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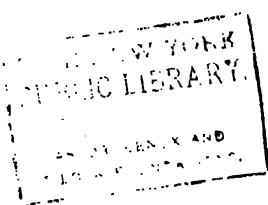




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Margaret Townsend







RAOUL AND IRON HAND

OR

WINNING THE GOLDEN SPURS

A Tale of the 14th Century

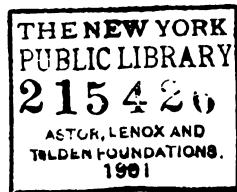
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ANONYME
ZALIGHE
VLAAMEN

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RAOUL AND IRON HAND;
OR,
WINNING THE GOLDEN SPURS.

CHAPTER I.

THE ATTACK ON THE CHÂTEAU.

“Down with the barons!”

“Death to the noblesse!”

The hoarse roar of a thousand discordant voices swelled into a horrid, mighty chorus.

“Hang ‘em!”

“Burn ‘em!”

The place was the north of France; the time, the latter part of the fourteenth century.

Below on the swelling, undulating plain, surging, pushing, and howling, was a great army of peasants. Strange, indeed, was their attire, for over their short leather jackets they wore richly embroidered mantles; chains of gold hung about their necks, while long,

gayly colored silken hose covered their thin, misshapen legs.

Above on the hilltop stood a stately château, shut in by walls as high as a two-story house and thick as a narrow street; around these walls was a broad moat that was crossed by a bridge, but to-day the bridge was drawn up, and the massive gates closed.

The château stood there on that beautiful October morning five centuries ago as if proudly conscious of its superiority over the squalid huts that were scattered about on the waste of uncultivated lands, and seemed to hurl down defiance from behind its sheltering walls to the infuriated mob below, who had been disappointed in their expectation of taking the château by surprise.

Not a trace of vineyard or cultivated field was to be seen. Blackened ruins of burned huts, and charred spots where hayricks had stood, showed that the devastating hand of war had been laid heavily on these once fertile plains.* An English army had but recently swarmed over the land, burning and sacking; and later, bands of the Free Companies had cruelly tortured the helpless peasants because they had no more to give, until the hapless victims of war and rapine had been driven to seek shelter in caves and forests.

* Edward III. was still trying to establish by force of arms his claim to the French crown.

At length, desperate with hunger, maddened by suffering, the peasants had arisen in their ignorant wrath, and in their turn had terrorized the country, attacking unprotected towns and châteaux whose defenders were either fighting the English invaders or languishing in prison on English soil.

Knowing that the Count de Rainault was with King John in England—both having been captured at the battle of Poitiers, and were now awaiting the amount of their ransom to be settled—an army of peasants had marched upon the château de Rainault during the night, hoping to take it by surprise. But its châtelaine had been warned, and she hoped to hold the castle until succor should arrive to disperse the peasant rabble.

High up in the castle, at a window in one of the turrets, stood the beautiful châtelaine, her face pale with apprehension, her eyes strained by watching. She shuddered as the threatening cries of the peasants reached her ears, and her lips moved in inaudible prayer.

By her side stood a handsome youth of fifteen years, with his arm thrown protectingly about her waist.

“Have no fear, *petite maman*,” he said reassuringly. “The wretches cannot storm the walls, as they have no machinery for assault, and succor must soon come.”

But the lady was not comforted. She started.

“Ah, what was that?”

“Only a horse champing in his stall, *petite maman.*”

Meanwhile, the fantastically attired mob, appareled in the costly robes of their murdered victims, pressed up around the castle walls. They looked apprehensively at the little watch-towers placed at intervals along the top, not knowing but that death lurked in every one.

As they clambered up the steep ascent to the castle walls, a shower of missiles and burning pitch poured down on their heads.

The assailants faltered, and then with frenzied yells that seemed to rend the quivering air into fragments, they rushed upward with redoubled fury, paying no heed to their stricken comrades who were felled to the earth by the missiles that showered from above.

But the walls were thick and strong, and the moat lay between them and the assaulting army. This broad ditch the peasants filled with the bodies of the dead and dying, and across this horrible roadway they passed in a mad rush to storm the gates.

Again and again they charged, but with no impression on the massive, iron-bound, oaken doors. Their fury was that of a ravening beast robbed of its prey. Hour after hour passed; it seemed as if their violent assaults on the gates must weaken them. But the day waned with no signs of a break. The inhabitants of the château began to feel some sense of security; help

would surely come in the morning. Toward evening the terrific noise of the onslaught ceased. Evidently the besiegers were disheartened.

Darker and darker grew the night; stiller and stiller the evening air, except when occasionally the wind shrieked around the turrets or moaned dismally in the wood beyond.

Vainly endeavoring to pierce the gloom with their aching eyes, the besieged knew not whether the peasants were keeping silent watch or had moved quietly away under cover of darkness.

At length the weary châtelaine ordered the evening meal to be spread in the great banqueting hall, bidding all come to the table, save the watchers in the towers, to refresh themselves after the long troubled day, during which none had a thought of food.

The long vaulted apartment was lighted by torches fixed to the walls in sockets, which flared fitfully, sometimes throwing bright gleams into every corner and making fantastic shadows on floor and wall, then again growing dim, leaving the chamber in gloom.

At the board sat the châtelaine with her young son, waiting-women, and retainers. The men were few and aged, or else crippled from many wounds. But she ate nothing, and soon arose and returned to the lonely turret, hoping that the starlight would reveal the retreat of the marauders. But the stars twinkled coldly and cast no gleam beyond the castle walls.

Suddenly she started, and clasped her hands high above her head, then with a low cry of anguish she turned from the window and sped down the turret stairs, her long white robes floating after her. So light were her steps and so quick her flight that she seemed like a winged angel, her lovely golden hair streaming far behind, mingling with the shimmering white of her gown. Down to the banqueting hall she flew.

“Quick, quick,” she panted, “out with the torches; they have found an entrance!”

CHAPTER II.

A TERRIBLE NIGHT.

When dusk had obscured the movements of the besieging army, a guard who was stationed in one of the watch-towers along the wall left his post, and stealthily glided from tower to tower until he reached one that was unguarded at the rear of the castle. Entering this, he passed down the stairway into the courtyard below.

He was a youth of sickly appearance, undersized and slight, so deficient in manly bearing that the Count de Rainault had dispensed with his services in camp and field.

Repulsive-looking at all times, he was more so as he sneaked through the courtyard, a malicious smile parting his pale lips.

“I’ll repay *petit monsieur!*” he was muttering. “As if one has not the right to beat his own dog—aye, and kill him, too!—without having the lash curled about his own shoulders. *Petit monsieur* shall learn that the memory of blows outlives even their scars.

“It was brave in me to have followed M. le Compte when he left after his secret midnight visit to our

lord and to have learned the secret of the underground passage. The good peasants shall be let in, and I'll lead the way to the treasure-room, into which they shall break that I may fill my pockets."

Moving carefully in the fast-gathering darkness, he entered the chapel where mouldered the bones of the dead Rainaults. It was a gruesome place, and Jacques trembled and gasped as the chill, damp air struck his face. It seemed as though grinning skeletons beckoned to him with long bony fingers from every tombstone. But the desire for revenge conquered even his fears. Creeping along the floor on hands and knees to the farther end of the vault, he pushed away a slab that covered what seemed to be a tomb. Instead, a flight of stone steps was disclosed. Down these steps he crept backward, like a little child going downstairs. At the bottom he struck a light with the aid of his flint, and then cautiously looked about him. What he saw was a passage walled with stone and reeking with dampness, a low, narrow passage through which two men could scarcely walk abreast.

Holding his torch as far in front of him as possible, he hurried onward, jumping violently when a rat scurried ahead of him, and once shrieking in his fright when some slimy object fell on his head from above and slid down his cheek, leaving a cold, wet track behind it. Still he pushed on, though his legs

faltered and his breath failed him ere he reached an iron gate that closed the passage. Drawing the creaking bolt, he stepped out into another passage which was neither walled nor paved.

Traversing this for some distance up a gradual ascent, he came to a hole, before which was a large stone so nicely balanced that a touch could move it. He carefully pushed the stone aside and slid through the opening, finding himself on the hillside at the back of the château, outside the walls.

He quickly scrambled down the hillside, and then ran around outside the walls to the front, where the besiegers lay sleeping.

It was near midnight. A few sentinels kept watch. Going to one of them, Jacques asked to see the leader.

“That is me,” said the peasant. “What is it that thou hast to say? Speak quickly.”

“I have found the secret passage to the château, and have come to show thee the way.”

“Good!” exclaimed the man. “Lead on.”

“Not all these men,” said Jacques. “The garrison is small, only a dozen in all. The fewer we take, the larger the booty for each.”

“Good!” said the peasant commander again. “We’ll take two score, and not tell the rest where we are going.”

Back to the entrance of the underground passage Jacques hurried, followed by forty greedy, desperate

wretches, through the passage, up the stone steps into the crypt, and then into the château.

It was their assault on the guard in the courtyard that Madame de Rainault had heard. Through the doors up to the banqueting hall they rushed pell-mell. But at the door they paused, for on raising the portière they were confronted by a blank darkness. Not an object could be seen nor a sound heard.

When Madame de Rainault had ordered the lights out she seized the hand of her son and ran with him to the upper part of the chamber. Pushing aside the arras that covered the walls, she passed her trembling fingers along the wainscoting, seeking a depression in one of the panels, which, on being pressed, would cause the panel to slide back, leaving an opening large enough for a person to pass through. On the other side was a staircase leading to a hidden chamber, where the châtelaine intended taking refuge. But in the darkness Madame de Rainault had miscalculated the distance from the deep embrasure window. In vain she ran her hand over the panelling; the spring was not there.

Then a cry of exultation was heard, and at the same moment was seen a lighted torch; the invaders had secured a light.

Gathering her flowing robes about her, Madame de Rainault crouched behind the arras, drawing Raoul down beside her. The frightened waiting-women

crowded about her, while the male attendants placed themselves in front of the women and awaited the attack. They had not long to wait, for so soon as the light revealed their position the marauders were upon them. Forty to ten, the men were soon overpowered and run through the body with their own swords. The waiting-women also became victims of their ferocity. Then the assassins looked about them for plunder. But Jacques missed the châtelaine and the young lord.

“Where are madame and monsieur?” he cried.

The others paused; they had not known that any had escaped their vengeance.

At that moment a white object was seen beneath the arras. Jacques drew the hangings aside and revealed Madame de Rainault clasping Raoul in her arms. With a quick movement Raoul wrenched himself from his mother’s protecting clasp. Springing in front of her, he drew his sword, ready to defend her with his life.

As his dauntless glance fell on Jacques, he cried:

“It is thou, miserable traitor, who has betrayed the château!” His indignant young voice rang out through the long, vaulted hall, dominating the clamor of the peasants’ voices.

“How dare you thrust yourselves into madame’s presence?”

A derisive shout rose from the many throats.

"Ah! *petit monsieur*, who art thou and thy mother that we should fear you?"

Before the boy had time to reply, his sword **was** plucked from his grasp and run through the heart of his idolized mother.

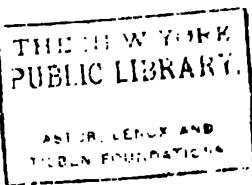
With a shriek of anguish mingled with rage, Raoul darted upon his mother's assassin, but his arms **were** pinioned from behind, and he was lifted in the powerful grasp of the leader, who bore him up to the top of the castle wall and pitched him headlong over it into the moat below, where he landed head foremost on a heap of the slain "Jacks."

Then the wretches ransacked the château, many a bloody fight taking place over the distribution of the booty.

Toward morning they went back to the banqueting hall, after foraging in the scullery, storerooms, and wine-vaults for food and drink. At length, gorged with food, drunken with wine, they slept. A torch fell from the wall. Presently tongues of flame licked greedily up the curtained sides of the chamber and across the rush-strewn floor. But the men slept on. Higher crept the flames and denser grew the smoke, but the sleepers paid no heed. Quickly and quietly spread the fire, noiselessly and remorselessly rose the thick, black smoke. The jacket of one of the sleepers **was** scorched and the hair of another singed. Then there was a sudden awakening. The men sprang to their



RAOUL DEFENDING HIS MOTHER.



feet, but the smoke blinded them. They tried to grope their way to the door. In vain they sought some means of escape from their horrid doom, but stifled, blinded, stupefied, they staggered, ran up against one another, and then fell. The smoke from the rush-strewn floor seemed like an inexorable avenger. The fate of the assassins was worse than that of their victims.

CHAPTER III.

IRON HAND.

Outside the chateau lay the great army of peasants. The rosy flush of dawn began slowly and softly to suffuse the eastern sky; birds called from tree to tree, but all else was still. As the sun mounted higher over the horizon, the twittering of the birds grew louder, but the peasants slept undisturbed.

Far down toward the east, behind the copse that nestled in the valley, appeared a moving light that glinted like sunbeams playing over the bosom of a tranquil lake. Gradually the scintillations grew brighter, the gleams darted hither and thither around the trees, and then all was dull again.

Presently, however, from behind the copse the light again appeared, growing brighter every moment, until the air seemed ablaze with flashing shafts of flame. Then clouds of dust arose, almost obscuring the lurid brightness, and from out these clouds rode a body of horsemen with banners flying and pennons fluttering, spears, helmets, and cuirasses flashing in the dazzling sunlight.

On they swept down the road and up the hill with

clash of steel and clatter of hoofs, and the sleeping peasants awakened to find the enemy upon them and their leader gone.

On rode the horsemen, trampling, spearing, and slashing the luckless peasants, who scattered like frightened sheep before a strange dog. All fled save a brave few, who massed themselves behind a huge fellow that towered head and shoulders above his companions and whose breadth of shoulder and girth of chest and brawny arm seemed more akin to the fabled giants of old than to the misshapen forms of his comrades.

In his hand was a heavy battle-axe, which he swung before him with mighty sweeps, felling all that came within its reach. Like a windmill whose revolving arms dealt death with every turn, he stood,—the target of darts, javelins, and spears. The horsemen formed in a ring about him, but he kept them all at bay with the circling sweep of mighty arm and battle-axe. At length he stood alone; his fellows either had fled or lay stricken in death at his feet. Closer circled the horsemen, quicker swung the battle-axe! A lance crashed against the bloody blade, and a splinter entered the arm that wielded the axe. Quickly grasping the weapon in his left hand, he renewed the attack. But a javelin pierced his thigh, and another at the same moment laid open the fleshy part of his left arm. Still he fought, till, bleeding and almost

lifeless, he sunk to the ground. Gathering his strength for one last effort, he flung his battle-axe far from him; so far and so fast it flew that it crashed through the helmet and skull of a horseman fifty feet away.

Not tarrying to despatch the fallen giant whom they believed to be already dead, or so near death as to be past recovery, the horsemen galloped off after the great army of peasants who had sought safety in flight.

— The hours passed. It was nearly noon. The wounded giant, who was called Iron Hand on account of the prodigious strength of both hand and arm, was beginning to recover from the faintness caused by the loss of blood, and was making vain efforts to rise. But every time he moved the gaping wounds began to bleed afresh. They ached intolerably and his throat burned as if on fire, but no one was on hand to give him a swallow of water. With muttered groans and prayers he lay there, afraid to die, yet loath to live under such torment. Heaven seemed far away, and the holy saints still farther, but he cudgelled his heavy brains to remember some of the prayers he had heard the good father say; but he could only remember the names of some of the saints, on whom he called in turn, beseeching them to come to his aid, promising to give all the booty he took from his next victim as a thank-offering. He begged, cajoled, and promised; until, almost hopeless, he addressed one more fervent petition to all the saints in general. So

absorbed was he in his petitions that he did not see a slight form at his side until he felt a light touch on his arm and heard the low tones of a gentle voice. Opening his eyes, he saw kneeling beside him a boy with a pale sad face surrounded with a halo of bronze-gold hair that fell in waving tresses down his shoulders.

Adoringly, reverently, half fearfully, the simple peasant lay gazing up into the pitying eyes that were looking down upon him.

“Art thou Saint Michel, Saint Gabriel—no, thou art too small,” and he paused abruptly, ashamed that his acquaintance with the saints was so slight that he did not recognize his saintly visitant.

“I am Raoul,” said the supposed saint. “What can I do for thee?”

When Raoul had been tossed over the castle wall he had landed on a heap of the slain, and striking his head, had been stunned, so that all during the attack of the horsemen on the peasants he had lain unconscious. Time and fresh air had revived him, and he had awakened to hear the groans and prayers of Iron Hand. Though he had awakened to consciousness, his memory still slept. He remembered naught of the past, and marvelled at naught of the present. He did not deny that he was a saint when Iron Hand asked him, for he did not know that he was not.

As Iron Hand continued looking up at him won-

deringly, Raoul said again, "I am Raoul. What can I do for thee?"

"Raoul!" repeated Iron Hand. "Certes, Père Amboise has never spoken of him to me, or I have forgotten!" He felt it would be ungrateful not to seem to know his visitor, so he hastened to add: "But certainly it is I who know thy beautiful curls; have I not seen them in the glass windows of the cathedral of Orleans?"

But Raoul did not heed him; he had taken the sash that girdled his doublet about his waist to bind up his wounds. Finding they needed cleansing, he picked up a helmet that had fallen from a dead knight's head, and going to a stream near by, had filled it with cool, fresh water.

"Water," murmured Iron Hand. So he held the odd drinking-cup to the giant's feverish lips, and he drank long and deep. Then Raoul washed and bound the gaping wounds as tenderly and skilfully as any woman, for he had often seen his mother and her maids tend the wounded men who had been brought to the château to recover or die—men wounded in the war with the English.

All day and night Raoul tenderly cared for Iron Hand. In vain he searched among the slain for food. He did not think to search the dead knights for jewels or gold, and Iron Hand felt backward about proposing to a saint to rob the dead. He was too weak

from loss of blood and lack of food to perform this last office himself, and it wrung his heart to see so much lawful booty wasted. He would have willingly spared a generous part of it for the church; but for neither man nor church to profit by this windfall was surely a sinful waste of opportunity.

As soon as Iron Hand could drag himself along, he proposed to Raoul that he should go in quest of shelter and food. He suggested this as a respectful reminder that though saints might subsist without material sustenance, it was too much to expect of mortal man, and a poor peasant at that. It was his sincere conviction that had Raoul been so minded, he could have made bread from stones.

- “I will go with thee,” announced Raoul briefly, and Iron Hand gladly acquiesced.

It was weary, painful work for Iron Hand to drag himself along, but his stomach ached for lack of food, and he was also eager to reach his abiding place that he might send some one to despoil the dead of their valuables. Raoul could do but little to aid him, as he, too, was faint and weary from lack of food.

It seemed many miles they traversed through dense woods and over swampy plains, and it was nightfall ere they reached the banks of the Loire, where Iron Hand said their resting place was to be.

Then Iron Hand gave a series of low bird-notes, and soon from beneath the overhanging trees and

underbrush farther up the bank a flat-bottomed boat was pushed out from shore, and a shaggy-haired, gaunt-looking peasant clad in a leather jerkin that did not reach his knees, leaving his emaciated legs uncovered, jumped into the boat and rowed down to where Iron Hand and Raoul awaited him.

He helped Iron Hand into the boat without a word, but paid no further attention to the boy than to gaze curiously at his handsome dress.

Rowing upstream for a considerable distance, he brought the boat close to shore under a high bank that projected over the water. Here they landed before a boulder that stood up squarely and firmly. Behind it was an opening large enough for a man to enter by crawling into it on his hands and knees. After a short distance the passage drew higher and broader, till a man could stand upright. Then it suddenly widened into an open space of considerable dimensions, in the centre of which was a well, and around which a few lean cattle were tethered. A low fire burned feebly not far from the well, a hole extending upward through the earthen ceiling forming the chimney. For a few seconds Raoul could see nothing but the fire, before which men, women, and children, scantily attired, were huddled. As his eyes grew accustomed to the dim light he could distinguish the expression of eager inquiry on the pale, wan faces. Even the animals pleaded with dumb eyes for food.

"Something to eat," said Iron Hand, his voice sounding strangely faint and weak for so large a man.

"Something to eat!" repeated one of the men. "Thou'l't get naught here. The last bit was eaten six and thirty hours since."

Raoul stood looking from one to another.

"Why do you live underground?" he asked.

"English burned our homes," came the answer briefly.

"Why don't you till the fields instead of living in idleness and want?"

"Seed-corn and tools sold to pay our lord's ransom."

"Where are the rest of your cattle? Surely all you men have more than these few miserable beasts."

"The Free Companies have taken them."

"Yes," said another, "and not content with robbing me of my horse and cow, see how they roasted my feet because I had no more to give."

"And look at my back," cried another, "where their lashes yet sting!"

"And mine!" "And mine!" came from other sullen voices.

Then a wave of unutterable pity filled the heart of the noble-born youth that such things could be on God's fair earth, and he registered a vow to Heaven that henceforth would he strive to aid the oppressed, to succor the needy, and to defend the weak.

Taking a brooch from the neck of his doublet, he held it out toward them, saying:

“Take it, sell it, and buy food.”

Like beasts of prey fighting over a morsel of food, the men scrambled and fought for the brooch.

“Stop!” said the boy with his habitual air of command. “It is for all.”

Then the eyes of the men turned upon him. A gleam of light flashed from his finger back to the fire. They caught the flash as it shot from the costly gem upon his finger—his father’s parting gift—and they cried out as with one voice:

“He has enough for all—the young seigneur! Why should he be decked with jewels while we and our children starve?”

In an instant Raoul was surrounded by a group of gaunt, pale-faced men, whose eyes were aflame with greed, and whose bony fingers were outstretched to clutch his throat.

CHAPTER IV.

RAOUL LE DIEU-DONNÉ.

The great pity that Raoul felt for these poor, famished wretches swallowed up his fear.

Then Iron Hand cried in commanding tones:

“ Hold! He comes from on high. He is a holy one. To touch him is sacrilege!”

At this announcement the men stayed their hands and looked in wonderment first at Iron Hand, then at Raoul, whose face was filled with the sweetness of ineffable pity, and they crouched down before him in abject terror, grovelling at his feet and begging for mercy.

“ Go,” said Raoul to one of the men; “ sell the jewel and return with food. If thou failst to deal justly with thy comrades, the wrath of Heaven be upon thee!” And in the dim, flickering light of the low fagot fire the face of the boy looked like that of an angel, and all heads bowed down before him. In those days superstition usurped the place of religion.

Later Iron Hand told his story, and henceforth Raoul was known among them as *Dieu-donné*, God-given.

and watched over his comfort almost unceasingly, staying near him by day and sleeping at his feet by night.

And thus the winter passed and the verdure began to take on the freshness of spring, and the men commenced to conjecture whether they would be permitted to till their land in peace, or whether the depredating hordes of freebooters would harass them again.

Then, one day, came a hunted fugitive to the cave, who begged refuge. He told how the peasants had been decoyed into a walled town; how the nobles had fallen upon them and hacked to pieces over nine thousand of them, reserving a few of the leaders of the Jacquerie for a crueler fate; how Guillaume Callet had been crowned King of the Jacks, his crown being a red-hot tripod, and his throne the lime pit.

And as he spoke, telling of the horrible fate of the rebellious peasants, the men's faces blanched, the women shook with fright, and the children shrieked in an agony of terror.

Then came days of suspense and nights of watching—nights spent in boats moored in the middle of the river so as to be safe from surprise. And faces grew whiter and forms more shrunken. Iron Hand sharpened his battle-axe, which his comrades had recovered for him after he had lost it outside the château de Rainault, and he swore that he would not die alone

while his strong right arm could wield the deadly weapon.

Then came the morning when the watchers appeared with horror-stricken faces. A body of men-at-arms were making direct for their cave!

CHAPTER V.

SIR GRIFFITH AND THE JACKS.

In the early morning, even before the black-robed heralds of death appeared upon the deserted streets of the city to ring their little bells and to announce the deaths that had occurred during the night, the western gates of the city of Orleans opened, and a small body of horsemen emerged therefrom. At the head of the horsemen rode a steel-clad figure on a richly caparisoned charger of roan color and of incomparable beauty, whose erect head, quivering nostrils, and flashing eyes marked him to be a horse of high degree. His thick, silky mane was decorated with gayly colored ribbons, and his tail, that swept out long and full, brushed his fetlocks.

The rider was worthy the steed. He was above the average height of man, and his breadth of shoulder corresponded with his height, while his face was unusually handsome. Golden-haired, golden-bearded, and with large dark-blue eyes that quailed before nothing, he looked like one born to command. Never had he yet met with one who could overthrow him, outleap him, or outride him, while with lance and sword and bow he could vie with any knight.

Sir Griffith was a Welshman whose depredations had made him the terror of the country between the Seine and the Loire. He commanded a body of free-booters, and was a free-lance—a knight of fortune. Since his occupation of this part of the country no man of fortune, be he noble or merchant, dared venture out of Paris or Orleans without an escort of men-at-arms. Scarcely a castle in the vicinity but could tell of his visit, and how he was affable, debonair, and courteous if the lord yielded to his demands and gave of his treasure and stores freely. But if he met with resistance, he showed no mercy and knew no pity. He and his band moved with almost incredible rapidity, here to-day, there to-morrow, and elsewhere the following day. Sorry was the fate of town and castle that attempted to resist him unless they were well prepared for his coming. Naught but a heavy ransom would buy him off.

So great was his fame as a freebooter that men-at-arms flocked to his standard and begged to be taken into his service. So many lances did he command and so many men-at-arms could he muster, that King John had tried to attach him to his service by promise of honors and fiefs. But Sir Griffith preferred to be a free-lance, and rule as a petty king among his followers, and to come and go as he pleased, than to owe allegiance to either French or English king.

Sir Griffith was in an uncommonly genial mood

that day, although he was always good-natured toward his dependents; it was only toward his superiors and equals that he displayed his arrogant temper. He was on his way to his rock-bound fortress on the Brittany coast, whither he was conveying an immense treasure, his plunder of several depredating expeditions.

Many were the sumpter mules that were laden with bags of gold and silver, cases of jewels, boxes of costly cloths and silks and velvets, some of which had come from the Orient, either brought hither by doughty crusaders or in the caravans of swarthy Eastern merchants. The mules with their precious burdens were guarded by archers, and followed in the wake of Sir Griffith and his horsemen.

Singing in a strong, rich voice snatches of *lais* and of martial *chansons*, he gayly rode onward; his fiery charger, snuffing the bracing air, curvetted, pranced, and pulled at the bit, eager to stretch his lithe limbs in a swift gallop over the springy turf. His master gave the word, and with a quick bound the beautiful animal was off, lying low and stretching out his legs in long and elastic strides, soon leaving the rest of the company far in the rear. But on came the pages and squires in full pursuit, the men-at-arms remaining with the archers to protect the treasure.

They had gone about a league, when Sir Griffith's horse, who was still in the lead, suddenly fell. His

rider was thrown over his head and struck the sward with a heavy thud mid the clash of his armor.

With a fierce imprecation the unhorsed knight slowly rose to his feet, not an easy thing to do on account of the weight of his armor. He approached the prostrate horse with threatening mien. But his anger soon changed to pity and even sorrow, for he found that the poor animal had broken one of his forelegs by stepping into a deep hole.

With gentle touch and soothing caress Sir Griffith examined the extent of the injury, and then kissing the noble steed between the eyes, and again stroking his glossy head and murmuring some endearing words, he drew his sword and plunged it deep into the heart of the suffering animal, while the poor beast looked upward into the face of his master and friend with eyes full of loving confidence. Love for master is the religion of horse and dog.

As Sir Griffith was sorrowfully regarding the death agony of his favorite charger, not ashamed of the tears that dimmed his sight, a light caught his glance, a light that seemed to come from the hole into which the horse had stepped. Looking downward, he saw that it came from the dying embers of a fire.

By this time his squires had joined him. He speedily silenced their inquiries as to the death of his horse by pointing to the hole. As one of the men gazed downward, he exclaimed:

" 'Tis one of the underground caves where the 'Jacks' have burrowed during the winter. Let's burn 'em out like rats in a hole!"

The suggestion met with the favor of the knight, who longed to be revenged on some one for the death of his charger, the like of which he doubted if could be found.

The men separated and began searching for the entrance to the cave. Sir Griffith remained by the dead horse. Presently cries of fright mingled with shouts of assault were heard, then an apparition arose from the hole in the roof of the cave. Sir Griffith crossed himself in reverent awe as his great eyes fell upon a pale spiritual face surrounded by an aureole of reddish-gold hair. The head was followed by shoulders, and the shoulders by the rest of the body, which was clothed in soiled garments of crimson samite and black velvet. Out onto the turf the figure stepped. It was Raoul, who had reached the aperture by means of Iron Hand's shoulders. He approached Sir Griffith and gravely saluted him.

The knight gazed at the stripling in silent wonder.

"I crave of thy bounty, Sir Knight, the lives of the poor peasants below. They have naught to give up but their lives, which are of value to no one but themselves."

"And who art thou, varlet?" asked Sir Griffith, who readily gained control of his tongue when he

found his subterranean visitor was of flesh and blood.

"I am called Raoul, *le Dieu-donné*," answered the boy.

"And why should I spare the useless lives of the wretches who have caused the death of my charger?"

Raoul but then observed the dead horse; he had given all his attention to Sir Griffith and his thoughts to the poor, death-threatened peasants below.

"Ah! the poor horse," he exclaimed, dropping on his knees beside the animal, whose eyes were glazed in death. "How beautiful thou hast been, and what ignominy to meet thy death like this instead of on the battlefield 'mid shock of assault, with the blare of trumpets in thy ears and the smell of blood in thy nostrils!" And Raoul stroked the glossy hide of the steed, the tears, whose fount seemed to have dried with his mother's murder, again starting to flow.

"Thy tears lie near the surface to bubble over so readily," said Sir Griffith. But his tone was kindly, for he was not displeased at the sight of the boy's regret over the death of the animal. A fine horse always claimed a fair share of a knight's heart in those days when so much time was spent in the saddle.

"To whom dost thou belong, or art thou free born?" he asked, the air of distinction with which Raoul bore himself having impressed him. "How camest thou here?"

Raoul looked at him with troubled mien. "I know not, my lord; they say below that I come from above."

"A simple one," said Sir Griffith to himself. "He may bring good luck. I'll bear no grudge for the death of my good charger; I'll spare their lives, and take this lad as hostage."

"Well, boy, if thou'lt join my service, thy friends, the peasants, shall be left in undisturbed possession of their underground château."

But at that moment a muffled roar was heard, while a mighty voice thundered up, it seemed from the bowels of the earth:

"No, no, he shall not leave me; he is mine and I am his!"

"Pardie, and who may this be?"

"Iron Hand," replied Raoul briefly.

"Iron Hand, the peasant giant! *Ma foi!* but I have heard of him. The fame of his strength has spread afar. I thought he had been killed in a recent skirmish. Bring him out that I may see if his reputation for prowess be exaggerated."

But there was no need to summon him, for at that moment was heard a roaring and a yelling, accompanied by sounds of axe upon steel, and down by the river bank rushed the knight's attendants pursued by a great figure clad in sheepskin, who was swinging his battle-axe to and fro in front of him with

such powerful blows that naught could withstand them.

“He comes, my lord,” announced Raoul calmly.

“In sooth, I see he does,” replied Sir Griffith, watching the movements of Iron Hand with considerable interest.

“Thou shalt not take him away,” bellowed the distracted giant. “Where is he?”

“I am here, Iron Hand,” said Raoul in the soothing tones one uses to pacify a frightened child.

Sir Griffith laughed loud and long to see that pale, fragile youth of fifteen years trying to allay the fears of the powerful giant nearly twice his age and three times his size.

Iron Hand took up his stand by Raoul, resting the head of his battle-axe on the ground, making no further demonstration, content to be by the side of his young companion.

The attendants of Sir Griffith now crowded about him, while their horses stood by under the care of pages.

“I have heard of thy strength, churl, and of thy size. Unless report belie thee thou art larger and stronger than I, and I am no weakling. But methinks there is no such great difference in our size. Approach!”

Iron Hand obeyed, and towered a full head above the knight.

“Pardie, thou art a big one,” exclaimed Sir Griffith, admiringly. “Is thy strength equal to thy size? If thou wert not a churl I’d wrestle with thee.”

Iron Hand glanced about him.

“Dost want that carcass to lie here to be devoured by the wolves, or shall it be food for the fishes?”

“The saints forbid! He shall be buried in the ground like a Christian. Here, varlets, bring hither thy spades and dig a grave.”

Many hands make quick work. The grave was soon dug. Sir Griffith declared that the horse should be buried in all his rich housings, and ordered his attendants to make a litter of their lances on which to carry him to his grave. But Iron Hand felt the girth about the body of the animal, and finding it of sufficient strength, raised the body with a powerful effort, swung it upon his back, and, unaided, carried it to the open grave and placed it therein.

“By my faith, but that was well done!” exclaimed Sir Griffith. “Fellow, thou art deserving of better fortune than awaits these wretches,” pointing contemptuously to the miserable peasants who were gathered about the knight’s party some distance away.

“I care not whither I go or whom I serve so long as Dieu-donné is near by.”

“Dieu-donné, as thou callst the boy, shall decide for himself. Either he and you join my band, or these peasants perish by the sword!”

“I will go with you,” said Raoul very readily, for the fresh air of the morning was sweet, and the sun shone brightly, and the grass felt grateful under his feet.

“No doubt thou’lt make a good lord,” said Iron Hand, dispassionately regarding Sir Griffith. “Thou lookst as though thou hadst brawn and muscle thyself.”

This tribute to his appearance gratified Sir Griffith, and he gave orders for the comfort of Raoul and his big attendant.

In due time the train of sumpter mules under the escort of the archers arrived. A horse was supplied Raoul, for Sir Griffith was amply equipped with these animals, and Iron Hand was given the choice of following with the archers or accompanying Raoul on horseback; for despite the boy’s fallen fortune Sir Griffith recognized that he was no common lad. The faithful peasant refused to be separated from Raoul, though he cut but a sorry figure on horseback, his long legs either dangling to the ground or curled up under the bowels of his steed. Like most big animals, unless excited, Iron Hand was the soul of good-nature, and he bore good-humoredly the fun poked at him by his comrades.

Raoul’s horse was a mettlesome little creature, who pranced and caracoled, and tried her prettiest to unseat her rider. But he was at home in the saddle,

being accustomed to ride almost from infancy, as was the custom with noblemen's sons. Giving free rein to the animal, he galloped off, and Raoul's spirits mounted higher with each stride of the steed over the sweet-smelling turf. But he was soon recalled by the cries of his former companions, the peasants, who, on seeing their saintly visitor departing apparently without a word, set up a howl of despair. The boy quickly returned, his face shading over with trouble.

"How can I desert these poor people?" he asked Sir Griffith. "They are afraid to return to their homes to till their fields; and, besides, they have neither seed-corn nor food. Their huts have been burned, their cattle stolen, and their ploughs broken."

Then Sir Griffith said a few words to one of the pages, who took a small leather bag from one of the mules and gave it to Raoul.

"Divide the gold this bag contains among the poor wretches," said the knight, "and tell them to return to their homes; and if any one molest them, bid them beware Sir Griffith's vengeance. And let this be a sign unto their enemies;" and taking off a ring, he handed it to Raoul, who gave it to the leader of the peasants. Thus their despoiler of a few months before became their benefactor.

CHAPTER VI.

LIFE IN THE CHATEAU ON THE BRITTANY COAST.

Sir Griffith did not take any particular notice of Raoul after they started on their journey until the boy, in the lightness of his heart at being once more on the surface of the earth with a good horse under him, and the green trees and fresh air about him, and the bright blue heavens above him, raised his voice in joyous song. Then Sir Griffith joined his tones with Raoul's, the men took up the refrain, and the woods rang again and again with strains that were not always harmonious, for the zeal of many a one of the company outdid his ear for melody. They rode all that day and the next, and it was not until the close of the third afternoon that they reached their destination.

Perched upon the beetling crags on the southwestern coast of Brittany, stood the walled-in château to which Sir Griffith was conveying his treasure. The walls were high and thick, and the castle that towered above them was a gloomy structure, square in shape and gray in color. As they rode up to its gates it seemed to Raoul like a prison fortress, and his spirits

fell not a little. Sir Griffith gave a shrill blast on his horn—once, twice, thrice, then a pause followed by a prolonged note.

The inmates of the castle had been all astir that balmy spring day to have everything in readiness for the reception of their lord.

“My lord is arrived,” passed from mouth to mouth. The great iron-bound oaken gate was opened, the drawbridge was lowered, and the retainers ranged themselves on either side of the gate, leaving a passage for the lord and his knights, squires, and pages to pass through.

All bowed low as Sir Griffith appeared at the head of his train. Smiling and bowing debonairly, Sir Griffith led the way into the castle up the great stone steps into the hall above, followed by his squires and pages. Raoul and Iron Hand were bidden to remain below with the men-at-arms and archers.

Sir Griffith spent the next few days in disposing of his treasure. Much of it went into his strong room. Some of it he used to furnish and decorate his château. Lamps of Etruscan make were suspended from ceilings by silver or bronze chains to take the place of pine torches that hitherto had been fixed in the walls in iron sockets; Venetian glass, bowls, platters, and flagons of silver were used on his table; Persian rugs and dressed skins of wild animals were laid upon the floors of the apartments which he

frequented; silken draperies were hung over doors and on walls; musical instruments were placed upon tables for the touch of skilful fingers; handsome stuffs were made into rich suits for his knights, squires, and pages by the nimble fingers of the château tailors,—for Sir Griffith liked luxury, comfort, and gayety.

Sir Griffith and his suite of knights of fortune, squires, and pages assembled for eating, talking, and gaming in the great hall above stairs; while the foot-soldiers and serviteurs, both male and female, gathered in the lower hall, at one end of which was the great fireplace, where scullions were ever tending and turning spits on which were hunks of meat, for the occupants of the château were as many as the inhabitants of a small village.

Raoul and Iron Hand were given their places in the lower hall, where they soon made themselves great favorites; the one by his interesting tales of love and war and his sweet singing, and the other by his good-nature and willingness to use his great strength in the service of any who needed it.

One night the lord of the castle sent down for his chief *piquer* or gamekeeper to attend him upstairs. When Jean returned to the lower hall, he informed the company that Sir Griffith had bidden him prepare for a hunt on the morrow, for complaint had been made of the depredations of a pack of wolves which

but the night before had ravaged the village of Esticourt, attacking both people and cattle, and as Raoul and Iron Hand had never seen a wolf-hunt they might both accompany him if they would wake in time.

It was still dark when the *piqueurs*, accompanied by Raoul and Iron Hand, armed with spears and with javelins stuck in their belts and bows slung across their shoulders, started for the forest some miles distant wherein the wolves had their lairs. The sun was faintly tingeing the east, heralding its speedy appearance when they reached the edge of the forest. Then began the search for the animals' tracks. It required experience to tell if the tracks were fresh or not, and whether they led in the tangled undergrowth, and the sun was quite high before they felt sure they were on the trail.

Outside the château gates, the horns sounded; the dogs bayed, straining at the leash; the horses stamped and champed at the bit, eager to feel the springy turf under their hoofs; and the men hallooed, till it seemed as if the noise was loud enough to frighten off all the wolves within a radius of twenty miles. But the noise seemed a part of the sport. The men were on the *qui vive* with excitement. The word was given, and off rode the party of knights, headed by Sir Griffith, and followed by a crowd of serviteurs carrying provisions, and as important in demeanor as though the

fate of the wolves as well as the welfare of the hunters depended upon their services.

It was yet early morning; the sun shone aslant from the east over the still dewy grass; the air was pure with the sweet freshness that early morning always seems to bring on a fair day, and they rode merrily over the country, seemingly so old and world-worn, with its huge rocks of granite and gneiss projecting abruptly outward and upward from field and bank, its great tracks of frieze and heath, about which were scattered huge blocks of stone, gray and bleak, Druidical remains of tall menhirs and flat dolmens. They occasionally met a Breton peasant clad in undressed skins and wooden shoes, with rough, unkempt hair flowing over neck and shoulders, who glowered up in dumb protest at the passing cavalcade of richly dressed hunters as they galloped over his fields, now almost ready for harvesting. On they went over frieze-covered hills and through wooded valleys, till they reached the forest where the *piqueurs* had already tracked the wolves. The *sous-piqueurs* had been stationed along the route to designate the trail of the game. Jean, the chief *piqueur*, accompanied by Raoul, was far in advance. Both felt sure he had tracked the wolves almost to their lair. Raoul once saw a gray object flash through the covert.

“There he goes!” he exclaimed.

Then Jean gave a certain blast on his horn that

signified the finding of a wolf; the forest resounded with answering blasts that certainly must have given fair warning to the prey to save themselves if they could. On swept the hunters over the rough, uneven ground, slippery with rotten leaves and strewn with broken boughs. Sometimes a horse fell and broke his leg; a plunge of the spear quickly put him out of his misery. Another was brought up by a serviteur, and all went forward as merrily as before. Still Jean and Raoul, though on foot, kept abreast of the foremost rider, running through places where a horse could not follow.

Suddenly there was a rush of a dark, lithe body, a gleam of eyes and fangs, and before Sir Griffith had a chance to launch his spear, the beast leaped upon his horse and fastened his teeth in the right shoulder of the rider. Sir Griffith called for aid, all the while striking at the animal with his hunting knife, held in his left hand. But the beast paid no heed to the knife-thrusts, tearing away at the flesh of the hunter's shoulder with fangs and claws.

In a moment another lithe form leaped upon the horse, and a boy seized the jaws of the wolf in his hands and wrenched them from the quivering, bleeding flesh of the knight; the wolf turned upon him, but Raoul was prepared for his attack, and with a quick lunge thrust his knife into his throat. The wolf again snapped at the boy, then quivered, rolled his eyes, and

fell to the ground dead. By this time Jean, who had been a few steps behind Raoul, reached the spot of conflict, but the wolf was already dead. The whole affair was over quickly.

“*Mordieu, but that were well done, mon brave!*” said Sir Griffith feebly, for the pain of the wound was intense, the flow of blood also great, and the man of immense strength grew weak as a babe, and toppled from his horse in a dead faint. His wound was quickly bound up in order to staunch the flow of blood, but now came the question of getting him home. He could not be put upon his horse, for every motion set the wound to bleeding afresh. It was decided to make a litter of their lances, to throw their cloaks over them, and thus gently as possible to carry him home. Then Iron Hand pushed his way to the still unconscious knight, turned his broad back toward him, put his hands upon his knees, and bade them lift him carefully upon his back. Four men sprang forward to do his bidding, and placing the knight on Iron Hand’s back, they took a saddle-cloth and brought it around the huge body of the giant, under the wounded knight’s shoulders, and tied it around Iron Hand’s neck, and he, putting his hands behind him, held Sir Griffith in place, and then with a swinging, easy stride started homewards with his burden. The noonday sun was hot; the sweat rolled down in rivulets from the faithful fellow’s face; his

breath sometimes grew short when he had a hill to climb, but he did not pause once to take breath, not even when he came to the steep hill that led to the castle gate. Not until the wounded man was laid upon his bed in his chamber did Iron Hand remove a hand from his support to wipe his face.

The barber leech was at once summoned. He pronounced the wound to be a bad one. Fever and inflammation set in, and it was many days before Sir Griffith was able to be carried to the great hall. The days passed wearily, and the time dragged heavily for the knight who had been accustomed to so active a life, and who soon tired of throwing the dice and of playing at draughts. He became irritable, and swore at his pages and squires, called the leech a fool of an old woman because he told him he would but risk his life did he attempt to ride his horse.

Once he heard shouts of laughter coming from below stairs, and he asked what made them so merry. A page was sent down to see, and he was so long away that Sir Griffith despatched a second after the first. He soon returned laughing also, and said that a young varlet below had a knack of telling such droll stories in so quaint a way that one would have to be a saint not to laugh.

“Let him be brought hither,” said Sir Griffith. “It seems to me that I have more need of his services than they below.”

So again a page was despatched to the great kitchen, and soon came back followed by Raoul, down-faced and ashamed because his dress was in rags and begrimed with dirt, as he had had no new clothes since he had been thrown over the walls of the château de Rainault. Neither did he know why the lord had summoned him to his presence.

“Come hither, boy,” said Sir Griffith. “Thou lookst as if thou had need of better raiment. Why art thou so dirty and ragged? Thy appearance is no credit to thy lord.”

Raoul did not answer, but stood looking down at the floor.

“Come, speak up; what hast thou to say for thyself?”

“Would my lord have me help myself from another’s stores?” asked Raoul desperately.

“In truth, no. *Voyons*, it seems to me I remember thy face. Thou art the keeper of that little lamb, Iron Hand,” and Sir Griffith laughed at his own wit, and his squires and pages joined in heartily, so glad were they to see their lord once more in a good humor.

“Yes, my lord.”

“And was it not thou who diverted from me the attention of messire the wolf?” he asked again.

“Yes, my lord.”

“Thou hast been poorly requited. Thy lord is

ungrateful to let thee remain in rags after so timely a service." He blew a silver whistle that hung about his neck. His valet appeared a few moments later.

"Pierre, take this youth and see that he is suitably attired. See to it immediately, and let him return to me before supper a different-looking fellow."

Pierre first took Raoul to the room where men and women were cutting out garments, sewing them up, and fitting them to several of the knight's attendants. There was one youth who particularly attracted Raoul on account of the almost girl-like beauty of face and hair and the symmetry of his figure, for, though eighteen, his form embodied strength and lightness. His costume of light-blue silk embroidered with gold braid set off his pure pink-and-white skin, and golden hair that fell in shining wavy masses down his back, though cut off square across the forehead like a man-at-arms. Evidently this suit was just finished, for he put out first one foot in its long, pointed shoe, the tip of which was caught by a golden chain that was attached to his garter, looking over his shoulder to see how the suit fitted down the back, then putting out the other shapely leg and foot, glancing back over the other shoulder, and so on. He took no notice of Raoul, save to push him haughtily from before a metal mirror that was hung upon the wall, in order that he might better examine himself in his new clothes.

Raoul's turn came next. Pierre chose some brown cloth with a golden glint, a stuff that had come from the looms of Flanders; some light woollen hose and tan-colored shoes. Then he selected material for a cloak and hood of some darker stuff, bidding the tailors to have the suit ready in three hours, though they had to stop all other work and put all hands to fashioning these garments.

The cutters, the fitters, and the sewers all grumbled, but did not think of disregarding the orders of the lord's personal attendant. When the shadows lay dark and long on the oaken floor of the general assembly-room, the high, narrow windows letting in but little light even at midday, Raoul presented himself before his lord. Sir Griffith sat in the corner of the great open chimney-place beside the glowing fire, for the thick stone walls and the absence of sunlight in the room made it damp and chilly even in midsummer, and it was still early in May. He did not recognize the slender form clad in a suit of golden-brown cloth that showed the graceful lines of the still boyish figure. The face had been well washed; the hair had also been washed, combed, and oiled, and fell in large curls about the throat, while across the forehead it was cut square a little above the luminous eyes of dark blue. No wonder Sir Griffith at first failed to recognize in the youth, whose pale, delicate beauty proclaimed him to be of gentle blood, the dirty,

shabbily dressed boy with rough, unkempt hair who had appeared before him a short time previously with downcast glance.

Now Raoul looked him straight in the eyes; he once more respected himself, and therefore feared no man.

"I am here, my lord," he said after a few moments of silence which Sir Griffith showed no signs of breaking.

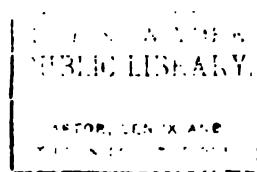
"*Mort de ma vie!* so I see; but I believe thou art he whom I sent for to amuse me. But I am in no humor for thy merry tales. I am weary, and my wounds pain me."

Raoul did not reply, but taking a lyre from a stand near by, he softly touched the strings and in low tones began singing. His voice was marvellously sweet. Sir Griffith paid no heed to him apparently, lying with his head resting against the high-backed chair, his eyes closed; but the lines of pain gradually faded away, and the fair, handsome face, over which the firelight played fitfully, became serene. So still he lay that Raoul, thinking he had fallen asleep, stopped playing and singing. Without opening his eyes Sir Griffith bade him go on.

And so Raoul sang on, and seeing that it soothed the suffering of his lord, he gained confidence and sang louder, his sweet, bird-like voice filling the great vaulted chamber. The click of the dice-boxes ceased,



RAOUL PLAYING BEFORE SIR GRIFFITH.



the sound of talking was stilled, and all gathered about the boy singer, and listened with enraptured ears.

Presently supper was announced. Raoul put by the lyre, bowed low, and was about to withdraw, when Sir Griffith laid his hand upon his shoulder, saying:

“Thou shalt eat with me hereafter. Pierre will give thee a bed in his room, and thou shalt become my *trouvère*.” And the lord of the castle bade a beautiful blonde youth in a suit of light-blue silk give his place to Maitre Raoul. And Messire Almeric de Raguenel scowled at the usurper of his place and cursed him under his breath, and in him Raoul recognized the youth who had thrust him away from the mirror that very afternoon.

Raoul’s music had acted upon Sir Griffith like David’s sweet songs upon the troubled soul of King Saul, for he ate and drank and talked. Suddenly he said:

“*Allons*, Maitre Raoul, but what merry tale wert thou relating that made thy comrades roar with mirth so lustily as to reach us here above?”

“Ah! my lord, ‘twas but telling how Gros Jean broke a colt to the saddle.”

“And how was that?”

So then Raoul told with inimitable drollery how Gros Jean had been boasting of his skill with unbroken colts, even now that he had taken on so much extra fat; and how the master of the horse had invited

him to show his skill on a three-year-old that had never yet been saddled; and how Gros Jean had asked them all to come and see how speedily he could reduce him to docility, and how the colt had got the better of him in every way. And he finished by saying:

“The colt was well enough; it was the rider who was stupid.”

“Which colt is it, Messire de Condillac?” asked Sir Griffith of his master of horse.

“‘Tis Charlemagne, foaled by Radegonde and sired by Tartare.”

“Ah! he comes from good stock. Well, boy, if thou’lt undertake to break the animal to the saddle, he shall be thine.”

Raoul’s face first showed incredulity, and then seeing Sir Griffith regarding him so kindly, it lightened up with pleasure, and leaning forward, he seized the knight’s hand and kissed it, murmuring: “A thousand thanks, my lord.”

But there was a face down the board that looked at Raoul with an expression that boded trouble for the boy if the ability of causing it lay in the power of him who was regarding him with so much ill-will.

CHAPTER VII.

CHARLEMAGNE.

The next morning, before the knight and his attendants were astir, Raoul slipped out of bed, put on his clothes, and hurried down to the stables. In the kitchen the serviteurs were preparing the morning meal; in the stables the grooms were grooming and feeding the horses. So soon as Charlemagne had finished eating, Raoul led the horse from his stall, patting his dark arched neck with its glossy mane. As he was about to lead him into the courtyard, one of the grooms roughly asked him what he was about.

Raoul answered: "That is my business!"

"Not so quick, my son," and the man laid a heavy hand upon the boy, and would have taken the halter-rope from him had not at that moment appeared the master of the horse. "What have you there?" he demanded.

"This varlet, Messire l'Ecuyer, was about to take the colt out into the courtyard."

"Well, why not?" The man looked almost stupidly at the master of horse.

“What are you about to do, my boy?” asked Messire de Condillac of Raoul.

“Lead the horse about the courtyard until he knows me,” answered Raoul.

“Take care, look out for thy neck.”

So morning after morning Raoul went down to Charlemagne’s stall, feeding him, petting him, leading him about the courtyard, getting him used to the bridle and to obey the sound of his voice. One morning he bridled Charlemagne, girted on a saddle-cloth, and led him down the hill to the plain below, and then tried to mount his back. It was easy enough to vault on his back, but the difficulty was to stay there. The horse plunged, kicked, reared, and finally rolled over on the green grass. He was not ugly, but protested in the only way he knew how against a new experience, against the surrender of his will and freedom. But Raoul was patient, nimble, good-natured, and persevering, and before the morning was over had made him understand what was expected of him. When Charlemagne really understood that it was only to canter and gallop over the green turf with a slip of a boy on his back, he did not think that so bad, after all, especially as he got an extra feed and an extra rubbing down after it.

He had not forgotten his lesson the next morning; indeed, he seemed as eager for his play as Raoul, for he whinnied and pricked up his ears and pulled at his

rope as soon as he saw Raoul. He had a long canter that morning, Raoul clinging to his back only by the grip of his legs. But the next day he saddled him, and Charlemagne greatly resented the putting on of that stiff contrivance that gripped his body so tightly and rubbed his back. He bit at it, attempted to kick it off, but Raoul held him by the bridle-rein until he convinced himself that the saddle had come to stay. Then Raoul leaped into the saddle and caressed and talked to the beautiful animal until at length he handsomely consented to accommodate his beloved master, but he made it evident it was only as a favor.

The first time the leech gave his permission to Sir Griffith to take a short ride he was overtaken and passed by Raoul on Charlemagne's back, who then turned and came toward his lord, pushing back his hood and saluting Sir Griffith respectfully as he approached him.

"Is the horse mine, my lord?" he asked eagerly.

"So that is Charlemagne," said Sir Griffith. Then he made Raoul put him through his paces and praised him heartily for his success in using him to the saddle. He bade him ride by his side, and Almeric de Raguenel scowled and bit his lip, for he had set his heart on having that horse, and here was a beggar who had usurped not only his place, but diverted his lord's favor.

“Maitre Almeric de Raguenel was a youth with a fertile brain, and he resolved to make the newcomer a laughing-stock of the château before the day was out. On their return to the château he asked Sir Griffith’s permission for the pages and squires to play at quintain.

“Pardie, yes,” said the knight; “I’ll give a piece of shining gold to him who hits the quintain oftenest and rides the quickest.”

Of quintain Raoul knew nothing, for it was a game learned at the court of Bordeaux. It was a sport played for the purpose of training young horsemen in the use of the lance. A board was put on a pivot on a high post; when this board was struck it revolved quickly. One end of the quintain was broader than the other; from the narrow end hung a bag of sand. It was the object of the player to hit the broad end of the board with his lance, then to ride past it before the board revolved, else he would get a blow in the neck from the bag of sand. If the player did not hit the broad end of the quintain, all the participants and onlookers laughed him to scorn; while if he hit the board and failed to pass from under it quickly enough, he was like as not unhorsed by the blow of the sandbag.

Raoul watched the others play, and laughed with the rest at the discomfiture of the unskilful, and as heartily applauded the dexterity of others. He re-

fused to join the game at first on account of his inexperience; when Almeric de Raguenel, however, turned and asked contemptuously if his new clothes but covered the heart of a girl, Raoul made no answer, but rode his horse to the starting-place.

He was entirely unaccustomed to handling the lance, and his first attempt went wide of the mark. Almeric led the derisive laughter that followed his attempt. The second time he came a little nearer the mark. The third time he managed to strike it, but before he was hardly sure of the fact the board whirled around and he received a thump on his back that sent him sprawling on the ground. Raoul's discomfiture put Almeric in high good-humor, especially as he was so skilled with the lance that he outplayed all competitors, and not only received for his reward the shining gold piece, but the promise of Sir Griffith to make him a squire before long. And Raoul, all unconscious of Almeric's jealous hatred, admired the handsome youth, his elegant dress, and, above all, his manly accomplishments, without thought of emulation.

After Raoul's sorry experience at quintain he began to practise with the lance, but he found that his strength and endurance were not equal to those of other boys of his age and size; so he entered into the contests of boys younger than himself, in running, leaping, and shooting at the butts, and he accom-

panied Sir Griffith on his hunting excursions, and before many weeks passed his face had lost the pallor induced by his winter's residence underground, his muscles had hardened, and altogether he looked a very different youth from him whom Sir Griffith had taken to be a spirit a few months previous.

Under his lord's instructions he had made a suit of dark-blue silk, embroidered in silver. On the first occasion of his donning this suit—it was a banquet which Sir Griffith gave to a neighboring seigneur—Almeric scoffed at the idea of a varlet, who did not know his own father, who had lived with a herd of wretched peasants, disporting himself like the son of a lord.

Raoul's pride was sorely hurt because he could not refute any of his rival's assertions. He felt humbled that in the presence of all the retainers he had to submit to insult instead of hurling the words back in the insulter's teeth. He could not fight Almeric, for he was better skilled in the use of weapons, was stronger, and, most cogent reason of all, he had once refused contemptuously to try a bout with a peasant who had been raised above his position simply by his lord's caprice, and would likely as not as suddenly be put back to the rank where he belonged.

But every day Raoul grew bigger and stronger, and was becoming more expert with the lance and surer at the butts; he could now send a light-weight

arrow straight to the bull's-eye at a distance of two hundred yards; twenty yards farther, and he would begin to practise with the war arrow, a weapon which he wished never to be compelled to use, for he hoped in time to become a lance. Men of obscure birth had become renowned warriors before, and why not he?

All this time Iron Hand was also improving. He had overcome many of his peasant ways by his association with Raoul, who was still his best friend, and also with the archers, who composed a large part of Sir Griffith's Free Company. He had become most expert with the heavy war arrow; no one had been known who had sent true to the mark so far as he. He also practised running and leaping; and for his services in carrying him when he had been wounded by the wolf, Sir Griffith had given him a powerful horse, one large and strong enough to bear the immense weight of the peasant giant. The Welsh freebooter mounted all his men in order to move with greater rapidity in his foraging excursions.

The summer passed quickly and fall was already at hand, when Sir Griffith began talking of going south to the court of Bordeaux to spend the winter. One day he let a word fall that showed his intention of taking Raoul with him. Raoul's heart leaped with joy, for the tales he had heard of the chivalry and brilliancy of the court of the Black Prince had fired his imagination. Perhaps in some way he might so

distinguish himself as to attract the notice of the chivalric prince, who was the model of chivalrous knighthood. Then came the thought of his obscure birth. Would so high and puissant a prince notice a youth who had lived with peasants and did not know his father?

Time and again he tried to think of his life before that morning when he found Iron Hand so badly wounded and had gone with him to the cave on the banks of the Loire. But it was as if a black cloud hung between that day and his earlier life. Sometimes it would seem as though it were about to lighten, for he would catch a vague reflection of a castle life, similar to the one in which he was now living; of a golden-haired woman—a spirit, perhaps, she seemed too beautiful for human form; and of a dark-haired, dark-eyed man, of whom he had a still fainter impression. Sometimes he thought these to be vain imaginings or dreams; sometimes he was sure they were shadows, as it were, of recollections. But when he tried to stimulate the faint stirrings of memory, his head would throb and ache, and he would become dizzy and sick. So he was forced to live in the present and to discard the past.

The day was set for the departure south of Sir Griffith and his retinue. All was in a bustle of preparation. New suits were to be made for the men and youths, fresh housings for the horses; Sir Griffith's

fine plate and furnishings, which were to go with him, must be packed, for he had taken a hotel for the winter in Bordeaux, and he doubted whether he could find there all that would meet his wants. Raoul was to ride Charlemagne, who looked very gay and dainty in his rich housings, and he was full of excitement and anticipation.

It was but two days before their start. Raoul was in the great kitchen talking to Iron Hand, with whom he was to remain so short a time longer, and who much deplored the fact that his *Dieu-donné* was about to leave him.

After a while Raoul's attention was attracted by hearing some of the men talking very earnestly about a visit one of them had made to a *sorcière*, who was so wonderful that she could see into the past and the future as well as common people could see a tree on a bright day at a distance of twenty yards. Then he told how she had described events in his past life that only a few others besides himself knew, and they were far away; and how she had told him he would succeed in anything he attempted on that day; and had he not won largely at dice? and that he would win a handsome maid with a fine *dot* if he would do certain things, and he was going to do them, for he knew what she told him would come true.

“What are these things, Ignace?” asked another of the men.

But Ignace put out his tongue in one corner of his mouth and screwed up one eye.

“Thou’lt have to find out for thyself. It cost me a pretty shining gold piece, and I’ll not tell thee for nothing.”

Raoul listened eagerly. Here was a chance for him to learn of his past. But he had no gold. He pricked up his ears, for they were talking again.

“Where does this *sorcière* live, Ignace? Perhaps there’s good luck in store for me also.”

“In the meadow back of the cross-roads, among the big rocks, the home, so they say, of the Poulpicans and Korrigans.” *

Where was Raoul to get any gold? He thought of the golden amulet he wore about his neck. No, he could not part with that; misfortune would surely follow him if he did. There was the ring his father had put upon his finger before he left home for the last time. No, he could not part with that, his father’s last gift! Ah, he had it! The brooch that he had given the peasants to buy food, he had another like it, but not so costly. He would see if that would not do.

* Malignant dwarfs and fairies are so called in Brittany.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE VISIT TO THE SORCIÈRE.

It was toward the close of the next afternoon before Raoul had a chance to slip away unobserved down the hillside, across the meadow, through a bit of pine woods to the cross-roads. At the cross-road stood a drinking fountain, moss-grown and ivy-covered. He had never been so far away from the château alone before, and though he was not naturally cowardly, the idea that he was about to invoke supernatural powers to unveil to him the past made his heart quake as he caught sight of a wee white-haired figure that flitted behind a bush and peered out at him with red eyes and wrinkled face. He was sure it was a Korri-gan, or fountain sprite, who bore all human beings special ill-will, appearing by day as a witch and at eventide as a beautiful ethereal little fairy wrapped in a long diaphanous veil. So he made the sign of the cross, which always put evil spirits to confusion, and passed on.

The road now was a narrow opening between two high banks, and went steeply down a hill to a furze-covered heath, evidently once an oak forest, for great

pagan stones were scattered about (the Druids erected their altars only in forests of oaks), that he knew sheltered Korrigans and Poulpicans. He hurried with shaking limbs past tall menhirs, which he had been told walked in the gray of twilight and crushed unwary travellers under them. He almost wished he had not attempted to visit the *sorcière*, for he doubted now if he would ever live to benefit by her knowledge, even if she did not bewitch him by her spells and use him in the practice of her unholy art. But he was not easily turned back after he had once set out to accomplish anything.

Down, down went the road, through wet and mire, brambles, tangled paths, to the vast wastes below. He could hear the monotonous moaning of the sea, that sounded weird and uncanny, very different from its monotone on the open beach. The huge waste was dotted by pools of water, and in their midst was a cluster of long stones that looked like a long, low hut. This, then, must be the *sorcière's* retreat. He advanced toward it, wondering how he was to enter, when he saw a narrow opening through which he could just squeeze.

The interior, so far as he could make out in the dim light of a few sticks burning on the hearth, was a sort of stone vault surrounded by upright blocks of granite; in the middle was a huge stone table, grooved in the centre, and about a foot above the middle of

the table glared two brilliant spots of light that changed from yellow to green.

Raoul stood still, his heart in his throat. Were those two blazing spots of light the eyes of the *sorcière*? A soft purr made known the identity of those fiery eyes; only a black cat, whose dusky form was almost invisible in the shadowy darkness.

Still he gazed without seeing anything that could possibly be the *sorcière*, unless she had taken the form of a cat. Then he heard in a shrill mocking voice:

“ *Petit Diable*, why dost thou not greet messire? ”

At the sound of the voice the cat gave a bound and lighted on the shoulder of Raoul. But he did not flinch.

“ Ha! messire is not afraid? ” Then he made out in the faint gleam of the burning sticks a little bowed shape.

He went up to it and said hastily:

“ I have come to ask thee to show me my past life.”

“ First show me thy gold.”

Raoul gave her the brooch. It had a flat surface, on which was engraved symbolic characters. She looked at it fixedly a moment, then said:

“ Breathe upon it, once, twice, thrice.” Again she regarded it steadily, then she breathed upon it, and rubbed it vigorously.

“ Thy past life is here. I see a great château with many persons moving about; a lady with hair and

eyes like a saint; a man—but he appears more seldom—then all is obscured." She breathed on the brooch again, again rubbed it hard and long, and again peered at it. But she shook her head, muttering all the while so low that Raoul could not catch her words.

"There is a dark spot that cannot be rubbed away. Thou must clear up that dark cloud thyself."

"How, old mother?" asked Raoul, disappointed at being told no more than he had already dimly remembered.

She did not answer. But taking a stone that had been hollowed out in the centre, she placed it in the embers. Into this hollow stone she poured a few drops of a colorless fluid, and chanted some words in a strange language. Then she took a gourd that hung by her water-pail, and filling it half full of water, she dashed it over the fire. The vault in an instant was filled with steam and ashes; the contents of the hollowed stone flared up brightly with a hissing sound and then faded into darkness.

Raoul could see nothing now on account of the darkness of the hut. Presently he felt some hot liquid rubbed on his eyelids. The next moment there was a whistle, and he heard the *sorcière* call:

"Wait outside; I will come." Then all was darkness and stillness again. He felt a smarting pain in his eyes, and was overcome with a feeling of drowsiness. He laid his head upon the table and slept.



RAOUL'S VISIT TO THE SORCIÈRE.



How long he slept he knew not. But when he awoke it was still dark. It was some time before he could distinguish any outlines. He tried to grope his way to the opening, but could not find it.

In vain he waited for the *sorcière's* return. The time passed and he became impatient. He knew Sir Griffith was to start with his retinue in the early morning, and he was eager to get back to the château; not that he feared they would start before his return, for he felt sure even if the *sorcière* did not return he could find his way out at daybreak. He regretted now that he had ever made any attempt to pierce the shadow that enveloped his past; he had given his brooch for nothing, for, try as he would, he could see nothing of the past, present, or future in the darkness of the witch's hut, for even *Petit Diable* had closed his fiery eyes in sleep after a few faint protests at being deprived of his evening meal.

At length, after fitful sleeping and weary waiting, he saw a faint streak of light through a crevice between two upright stones. Then he arose from his hard couch and groped his way toward the faint light. He thought it came through the doorway, but the opening was no longer there. Then he tried to find the doorway. He pushed his whole weight against every block in turn, but every stone seemed to fit equally tight. He began scraping away the dirt, hoping to make a hole under the stone through which he

could crawl out, but he found that the upright slabs seemed to go far down into the earth. The sun was high, his stomach began to clamor for food, and then he grew anxious lest Sir Griffith should depart for the south and leave him behind.

He pushed at the stones, he dug out the earth at his feet, he shouted himself sore and hoarse, with no avail. He was a prisoner. What had become of the *sorcière*?

The long day passed. The light in the crevice had brightened, dimmed, and faded again. Another night came on, and still Raoul was a prisoner in the *sorcière's* hut. He slept fitfully through the night. *Petit Diable* was restless, feeling, no doubt, as did Raoul, half famished. Once when he awakened, it was to see the pale light of dawn coming through the narrow door-like opening to the hut. The stone had been removed. Springing to his feet, Raoul crawled through the aperture and started for the castle. He reached the postern gate before any of the inhabitants of the castle were stirring. After half an hour's tedious waiting the gate was opened.

“Has Sir Griffith gone, Ignace?” asked Raoul eagerly.

“Aye, nigh twenty-four hours ago.”

“Perhaps I may overtake him yet,” thought the boy. So he rushed to the stable, only to find Charlemagne's stall empty!

CHAPTER IX.

ALMERIC AND THE JOURNEY TO BORDEAUX.

When Raoul left the postern gate on the afternoon before Sir Griffith's departure for the south, he was seen by Almeric de Raguenel, who wondered what business he had that took him alone from the château at that late hour of the day, so he quietly followed him.

Sir Griffith's liking for the stranger lad had aroused a jealous fear lest he be supplanted in his lord's favor. Almeric was ambitious, and dreamed of great exploits and high advancements, of perhaps securing the leadership of the Free Company itself, did anything happen to the Welsh knight, or should he become weary of so active a life. Raoul's quick rise into favor had disturbed him; he did not want him to go south, for his sweet singing might also attract the favorable notice of the Black Prince. But how to prevent it he did not know.

When he saw Raoul enter the hut of the *sorcière* a sudden plan quickly presented itself. Old Brigitte was the grandmother of Jean, the head game-keeper, and he had more than once accompanied him

on an errand to his aged relative. Jean never entered the hut, but summoned Brigitte by a peculiar whistle, which Almeric had learned to imitate. After Raoul had remained about ten minutes within the hut, he had given the clear, shrill whistle; the *sorcière* had answered it, and was surprised to see Almeric instead of her grandson, the only being on earth besides her cat, for which she had any feeling.

"Well, young gentleman, what do you want of Brigitte that you call her away from her sacred mysteries?"

"Jean is ill, Brigitte, and has sent me to ask thy aid. Wilt thou come at once?"

"Ah! is my brave Jean ill, then? Wait a little moment until I send away the young messire who is within."

"No, mother, close the door and leave him there till thy return. Thou'l be back in an hour."

"He'll sleep that long," she muttered to herself.

"Had we not better close the opening," asked Almeric, "so he'll be sure to await thy return?"

"It would be as well." So Brigitte pushed an upright slab that worked on a pivot with a spring, and imprisoned Raoul within.

As Almeric led the way to the château with Brigitte hobbling after, he wondered where Raoul had obtained the gold necessary to make Brigitte open her mouth.

"Has thy visitor paid thee well?" he asked.

"In faith! I don't know. He gave me a bauble."

"Let me see it."

But Brigitte regarded him with a cunning leer.

"What will messire give to see it?"

"Nothing, just to see it. But if it please me I may buy it with this," and he drew out of his pocket the gold piece given him by Sir Griffith.

The old woman's eyes glowed with cupidity. The brooch was of little value to her; she did not know where to sell it, but the gold piece represented a larger sum of money than she had ever had in her possession at one time.

She held up the brooch for Almeric to see. Something prompted him to buy it. He thought it very probable Raoul had stolen it; he might be able to use it against him some time.

When they reached the château, Almeric took her into the great kitchen, where the evening meal was in progress. He found her a place, and whispered to her right-hand neighbor to give her all the wine she could drink. It was not often that Brigitte had such a good meal and such an unlimited supply of wine, and she forgot that she had been told her grandson was ill, and ate and drank so much that when Almeric came downstairs again later in the evening, she was hilariously drunk, and affording much amusement to the company by her fantastic capers. She drank until she became stupid, and then they put her on a bed of

straw in the corner of the great kitchen and covered her with a cloak.

The old *sorcière* lay on her straw bed until the next night. When she arose she was giddy and weak; she refused all food, and asked to be allowed to go home. It was midnight ere she reached her hut; she touched the spring that turned her stone door, and entering, lay down upon her bed of dried leaves beside the empty fireplace.

Sir Griffith had ordered an early start, for their first stage would be a long one. In the confusion of getting ready Raoul's absence was not noticed. Charlemagne was saddled and bridled with the rest of the horses, and stood champing his bit, awaiting his master. Sir Griffith did not ask for Raoul until they were about to ride out of the castle gate.

"He is probably in hiding, my lord," said Almeric, "for he told me yesterday he was but sorry to leave Château d'Esticourt."

"Let him remain, then," said Sir Griffith indifferently, and he gave the command to proceed.

Almeric lingered behind; then, when nearly all had passed over the drawbridge, he took Charlemagne's bridle-rein, telling the groom who held him that they would pick up Maitre Raoul outside the walls. When some miles from the château, Almeric jumped from his horse, gave it to his attendant to lead, and leaped upon Charlemagne's back. But the horse did not like

the change of masters; he sidled, pranced, reared, and seemed as if he would kick out, then thought better of it, and went on quietly enough till they came to a brook. He showed he wanted a drink; Almeric gave him his head, and before he knew what he was about, Charlemagne lay down in the water and rolled.

When Almeric sprang to his feet, wet and angry, he seized his whip, and was about to punish the animal severely, when he bethought himself. Sir Griffith would never allow an animal to be ill-treated, and should he chastise Charlemagne the knight would inquire into the matter, and then find out that Almeric had appropriated Raoul's horse. So he took his own horse back again, and after reaching Bordeaux exchanged Charlemagne for an animal belonging to a squire of the suite of the Prince of Wales.

Before Sir Griffith's departure many of his men asked for leave of absence. They had gained rich booty during their service with the robber knight, and now they wished to go home to friends and neighbors to display their wealth and rehearse their deeds of prowess. Therefore when the winter set in, the occupants of the castle were reduced to a comparatively small number.

Raoul, despite his disappointment at not accompanying Sir Griffith south and his grief at the loss of Charlemagne, enjoyed his life on the bleak Brittany coast that winter. He learned to love the sea

and its awful grandeur when it ravaged the coast and dashed with impotent fury against the rocks on which the château was built. Sometimes he would join the fishermen on wild days and go out in their little flat-bottomed boats; and he rejoiced with the lowly fisher-folk when the hardy Bretons returned home from their fishing expeditions with laden ships.

In that bracing air, with the wide salt waves of the Bay of Biscay spreading far to the south, and the wind-swept moors of northern France stretching northward, Raoul rapidly gained in strength and increased in stature; and since that memorable night when he had lost mother and home at one fell stroke, he had developed from the slender lad of fifteen to a sturdy youth of nearly seventeen, tall and well formed, skilful with sword, lance, and bow, lacking naught of manhood but breadth of shoulder and girth of chest.

Raoul and Iron Hand were great favorites with all the household. Many were the winter evenings that the handsome youth beguiled them with song and story, relating the valiant deeds of Alexander and Charlemagne, who were made the embodiment of knightly prowess and chivalric valor.

The state apartment had been denuded of its rich hangings and luxurious furnishings, which were carefully put away in iron-bound chests; and where once feast, song, and merriment had been, now were silence and gloom. It was in the lower hall that the household

used to assemble on winter evenings before the great roaring fire in the immense open chimney-place, basking in the genial warmth of the burning logs, while outside the ocean roared, and the waves beat against the rocks, throwing their spray up to the castle walls, and the wind shrieked among the watch-towers and moaned down the chimneys, when the country round about was white with snow and infested by wolves made bold by hunger.

It was then that Raoul would bring forth his rebec, and would play and whistle while the men and maids made merry in dance, or would sing some plaintive *lai*, while the men polished their armor and weapons, and the maids plied their distaffs, pausing ever and anon to nod approval, or else stealthily to wipe away a tear, just as the humor of the song or poem chanced to affect them.

Meantime Iron Hand had changed wonderfully. He was no longer the uncouth peasant that had believed Raoul to be a saint, though he still regarded him as little lower than the angels. In the constant company of men of fortune his wits had become sharpened, while insensibly he had copied Raoul in both speech and action. His prodigious strength, together with his extreme good-nature, had won him the respect and liking of his fellows.

CHAPTER X.

THE SHIPWRECK AND THE RESCUE.

The winter passed swiftly in the château, and the latter part of March was at hand. All through the winter months the inmates of the château had no further communication with the outside world than through the peasants and fisher-folk, who brought their produce to the castle, part to sell, part in the shape of feudal exactions.

Not a ship had passed within sight of the rock-bound coast, though a constant lookout was kept in the watch-tower on top of the château. Raoul took his turn with the rest in the lofty perch that commanded both sea and land. He once asked the reason of keeping so constant a watch, and was told that it was the custom of all coast castles so as to give warning of the approach of a foreign foe or to be ready to give succor to distressed craft. March that year went out like a roaring lion. Never had the fisher-folk seen stronger gales or higher seas than in that memorable year.

It was Iron Hand's watch, and way off in the outing he spied white sails that seemed to be struggling with

wind and wave. He reported his discovery to the seneschal.

The castle was all astir. Watch-fires were ordered to be lighted on the castle walls and not allowed to die down day or night. As the night closed in the tempest increased. It was Raoul's first sight of a ship at sea in a storm of such violence. His sympathy was keenly aroused by the peril of the seafarers, and he offered to watch the fires that night. Never did fires burn brighter or flare higher. Raoul kept his helpers busy in bringing wood and oil, and piled on the logs and poured on the oil unceasingly. Impatiently he awaited the break of day that the laboring vessel might make a safe harbor, for so ignorant was he of navigation that he thought land, though treacherous and rock-bound, offered more safety than the open sea. He did not know that he was luring on to certain destruction the ill-fated vessel with its unfortunate passengers by this prodigious bonfire; that the flotsam and jetsam were the vested rights of the lord of the château; and if the anxious captain of an unfortunate ship which had been blown out of her reckoning was deceived by the fires, it was so much the worse for the ship and so much the better for the châtelain.

When the gray light of that winter's morn broke, it disclosed the vessel foundering a short distance off the shore, in the relentless clutch of the devouring seas, the plaything of wind and tide.

"Boats to the rescue!" cried Raoul. "She is sinking." But it was impossible to launch boats from those high bluffs. Below, at the foot of the hill, they could see the fisher-folk thronging the beach, watching the death-throes of the doomed ship, without attempting to offer assistance.

"Why don't they go to the rescue? What are they waiting for?" cried Raoul, almost beside himself with excitement and fear for the endangered seafarers. "We must hasten to them, or they will all perish."

"As you say, *mon maître*," for so Iron Hand now called Raoul. "Come on, then," and seizing Raoul, he swung him upon his back and started down the hill-side at a pace and stride that seemed to make the ground melt away under his feet. They were but a few moments reaching the beach at the foot of the hill, and Iron Hand deposited Raoul in the midst of the astonished fisher-folk with as much *sang-froid* as if that mode of locomotion was the usual one in that part of the country.

"To the boats!" shouted Raoul.

But the men made no movement.

"Are you all cowards?"

"It's no use, master; not a boat can live in that surf," replied one of the men.

"Do you mean, then, to let them drown before your eyes?" exclaimed the youth indignantly.

"Please God no harm will come to them, but if

it must come, it must, peace be to their souls," and the speaker piously crossed himself, all the while intently watching the laboring ship.

"I hope it has a rich cargo," said one, "for we may get some of the pickings."

"If it's a trading ship from Flanders it's likely to be well filled," said another.

"Is there no brave man among you who will go with me?" asked Raoul desperately. "I would go alone, but I cannot manage a boat."

"Nor no one else in this wind," muttered a weather-beaten fisherman.

"I'm here, *mon maître*," announced Iron Hand calmly, as if Raoul could not see him, but needed auricular evidence of the fact.

"Canst thou manage a boat?" demanded Raoul half-contemptuously.

"Never tried, *mon maître*," returned Iron Hand imperturbably.

Meantime sea after sea swept over the doomed vessel, that seemed to be stranded on a rock not two hundred yards from shore. They could see the hopeless, agonized faces of the men in the rigging; one or two plunged overboard in a mad attempt to reach shore, only to be swallowed up in the greedily devouring waves.

"Again I ask, will no one go with me, or must I go alone?" Raoul's tones were almost despairing.

“I’ll go, *mon maître*,” as if his aid were sufficient.

“We have our women and young children to provide for, young sir. It is no lack of courage. A Breton fisherman is not afraid of the sea, but it is hopeless; they must die.” This doom was pronounced without emotion; it was the fortune of the seas.

Then Raoul dragged a boat down to the beach, where the water dashed upward and then retreated, leaving a long stretch of wet sand. As the next wave swept in, he sprang into the frail little boat, motioning Iron Hand to follow. But the great, sturdy fellow shook his head as he saw the wave dash inward, seize the quivering cockle-shell in its relentless grasp, and bear it off as it retreated seaward.

“No, *mon maître*,” he shouted above the roaring and hissing of the sea, “that is no place for Iron Hand.”

“What! Iron Hand a coward!” Raoul hurled the words back to the shore with contemptuous anger.

But Iron Hand did not answer; he had pulled off his great sheepskin boots, and stepping into the water, he waded out after the boat, saying to himself:

“Iron Hand may be a coward, though he is not afraid to follow where any man leads, but he wants to go his own way.”

How far he would have waded into the seething water there is no telling, but the cockle-shell of a boat was almost swamped several times before he had waded breast-high. Then came a retreating wave that

carried the boat far out toward the laboring vessel; but it was met by an incoming one that caught the boat upon its crest and dashed it with vicious fury far up on the beach. Iron Hand had seen the advancing wave and had prepared himself for the shock, receiving it on his broad back, which he turned toward it, putting his hands upon his knees. In that position it would have seemed that he could have caught a falling mountain.

After the wave dashed in and out, Iron Hand turned toward the sinking vessel to see her prow lifted high in the air, careen over on her farther side, right herself again in her brave struggle with the angry seas, then with a shudder plunge downward beneath the waves, her masthead and the swirling water showing where she had stood a moment before.

A moment longer they watched, when Iron Hand saw a white object borne upon the crest of a wave. Every undulation of the water brought it nearer to the shore. At length it was seen to be a human form. Nearer it came, only to be borne out seaward again. Back and forth it was tossed until it came within reach of Iron Hand's long arm. He dived to catch the body, but it eluded his grasp. Again he waited, again it approached, and again he tried to clutch the body. This time he was successful. Holding it in his arms, he waded to the shore. It proved to be the body of a young girl, who was apparently dead.

CHAPTER XI.

THE LADY YSOBEL.

Back to the château hurried Raoul and Iron Hand, Raoul far in the lead, for Iron Hand found it a much greater effort to ascend the hill with the form of a half-drowned girl in his arms than to descend it with the heavier weight of Raoul on his back.

But the castle was reached in due time, and the bit of human flotsam was delivered over to the care of the seneschal, who consigned the still unconscious girl to the women to be dried, warmed, and restored to consciousness.

Long and faithfully they worked over the poor girl to bring back warmth to the half-frozen body and consciousness to the benumbed brain, for she had been almost frozen by the icy water, and had been rudely buffeted by the tempestuous waves. Even after sensation was brought back to the body it was many days ere they were sure that she was restored to life. Tender nursing she had, but not skilful; for in that château on the bleak coast no gentle châtelaine, skilled in the healing arts, was there to dispense cura-

tive herbs and soothing drinks, and apply healing ointment alike to noble and ignoble born. Only women with kindly hearts, but roughened hands, ministered to the comfort of the sick girl, who bore evidence of being of high birth and stately rank.

It was spring in Brittany before she could tell of herself. Then she informed her attendants that she was the only daughter of the Sieur de Clermont, who, on the breaking out of the Jacquerie, had conveyed her to the home of her grandparents in the fortress city of La Rochelle, a city which, by reason of its impregnable position, was secure against English invaders and peasant insurgents. Her grandfather had recently died, and as the insurrection of the peasants seemed to be quelled, her father had sent for her to return home, giving orders that she was to be brought back by sea lest she fall into the hands of the English or the Navarrese brigands, who would hold her for a large ransom. The vessel had encountered storms, and been swept northward past the mouth of the Loire. The captain had steered for the lights on the coast of the Château d'Esticourt, which he believed to be the beacon lights of the harbor, placed there for the guidance of distressed mariners.

When Raoul learned that the fires had been lighted to lure the vessel to destruction for the sake of its freight, his indignation and wrath proved so violent that the seneschal threatened him with the dungeon.

"All is fair in time of war," said the seneschal. "How did I know but that it was one of the English fleet? and so long as England keeps our king a captive she must not be surprised if she lose a vessel or two. It is the right of every Breton to despoil the enemies of his country, if not by fair means, then by foul."

The first day the Lady Ysobel was able to leave her room Iron Hand was summoned to carry her out into the air. A hassock was put on the top of the broad wall in a sunny spot, and on it the peasant giant carefully placed the little maid. She was glad to get out into the warm spring sunlight, out of the gloomy chamber where she had spent several weeks; but she was heartsore and sick for the sight of her home and friends. How utterly alone she felt among the inhabitants of the Breton castle, of whom she had seen none but her waiting-women, the leech, and Iron Hand, she alone could tell. And as she sat there looking over the wind-swept moors in the direction in which she believed her home to lie, the tears rolled down her pale, thin face.

The burden of her misfortune lay heavily upon Raoul's conscience, and when Iron Hand told him how he had brought the stranger damozel out into the air, the penitent youth resolved to see her, tell her of his unwitting part in the disaster that had made her a captive, and to promise her that so soon as Sir Griff-

fith should return he would plead with him to restore her to her father without ransom.

So he went to the place where Lady Ysobel sat quietly weeping, though he did not know with what words to begin his story. But when he saw the pale, tear-stained face he thought no more of what he should say, but throwing himself down by her side, bade her not to weep, for he would restore her to her father ere long. He talked to her, told her how good and gentle, though strong and powerful, Sir Griffith was; how he was expected back to Brittany very soon, and then he would, no doubt, take her back to her father.

The Lady Ysobel's spirits rose after that, for youth is ever hopeful, and every one in the château acted kindly toward the young girl, so lonely among them all. The grim old seneschal himself proposed that she should ride with them outside the castle gates, and saw that a horse was broken to her use; Raoul told her all the legends he knew, and recited all the verses he had learned, and sung to her; so she waited patiently till the time should come for Sir Griffith's return.

But one day came some of his men, saying that Sir Griffith might spend the summer south. Then the Lady Ysobel grew pale and sad again, and often Raoul would come upon her unawares and find her silently weeping. He would try to comfort her and bid her

wait patiently; but one day she burst into such a violent fit of weeping that Raoul was frightened, and he begged her to be calm, and he would take her home himself without waiting for Sir Griffith's return.

It was arranged that on one of their riding expeditions she and Raoul would gradually separate themselves from the rest of the party; then they would gallop swiftly away to Nantes, from there to Tours, and on to Clermont.

It was a rash plan for two young persons to attempt to escape from a party of well-mounted riders, and to pursue their way from Brittany to Orléanois without money or its equivalent. But they thought only of the result, and regarded little the means of accomplishing their object.

It was some days before the weather permitted them to go riding again. As the seneschal was not one of the party, Raoul felt their opportunity had come. He managed to separate himself and the Lady Ysobel from the rest of the party by diverging around a clump of rocks. Once out of sight, he seized the rein of Lady Ysobel's palfrey and put their horses to a gallop. But they had not gone many miles when they heard the beat of horses' hoofs in pursuit. He listened a few seconds and found their pursuers were gaining upon them, and then turned their horses' heads and went back to meet their late companions.

"We must try another time, demoiselle," was all he said.

That night the seneschal called Raoul to him and asked if Jean, the head-keeper, was right when he said that he and the demoiselle had wandered from the rest of the party. Raoul answered frankly in the affirmative, saying that as he had been the cause of the demoiselle's capture it was his duty to return her to her father.

"That is the affair of the lord of the castle. Thou must promise me to make no further attempt to aid the demoiselle in escaping, but wait till Sir Griffith returns, when he will do as seems best to him."

Raoul would not promise. The seneschal did not press the matter, but the next night, while Raoul was sleeping, four men came to his bedside, lifted him from his bed, and despite his desperate struggles carried him to a stone apartment beneath the banqueting hall, reserved for recalcitrant inhabitants of the château. A bed of straw in one corner was the only attempt at furnishing.

Several days passed without any one entering the room, his food being handed him through a square opening in the iron-bound door. After he had been given ample time for reflection, Raoul was visited by the seneschal, who informed him that his liberty would be restored on his promise to refrain from interfering with the duty of the seneschal, which was to retain

the maid until the lord's return, who would then remit the ransom if he saw fit. But Raoul refused to promise.

Vainly Raoul tried to devise some means of escape for himself and of rescue for the maid.

CHAPTER XII.

THE TRAP-DOOR.

One day as Raoul lay on his back on his bed of straw, he noticed that the ceiling of his cell was made of wood, instead of stone like the walls and the floor. He idly mentioned this fact to his keeper the next time he brought him his food. Raoul was not treated with severity, for his food was the same as the others had, and his keeper, since the seneschal's visit, was allowed to remain a few moments to chat with him on the happenings of the household.

In answer to Raoul's remark, the keeper told him he had heard many a queer story about that room. It was directly under the great banqueting hall, and when the lord of the castle had a troublesome friend or a dangerous foe, he would seek his company, make a feast to which he would bid him come, and give him the seat of honor, which was directly over a trap-door that was so skilfully concealed that none observed it.

After the guest had eaten, and drunk long and deep, when the servants had been dismissed and the revelers were too drunk to observe aught, the platform on which the luckless guest was placed would descend,

the trap-door would drop, and the chair and occupant would be precipitated into the dungeon. Then the guest would be slowly starved to death, and his body buried beneath the very stones on which they stood. With a blunt good-nature the keeper added:

“ And where thine also may yet lie unless thou dost as the seneschal would have thee.”

Raoul thought over this piece of information, wishing he could use it to his advantage in the matter of his escape. The next time Iron Hand was allowed to visit him, Raoul told him what he had heard in regard to the trap-door, and bade him pick up all the knowledge he could concerning it.

Iron Hand was no longer a simple peasant whose muscle far exceeded his wit. He bided his opportunity, and then encouraged Ignace, Raoul’s keeper, to gossip over the great festivities of which the château had been the scene, and hinted that he had heard of mysterious disappearances.

Ignace required but little more encouragement to talk than that which a good listener unconsciously gives, and he told stories of old quarrels, and of vengeance taken and scores wiped out.

One of his tales Iron Hand astutely pretended to doubt, charging him with telling things that existed only in his imagination.

“ Now, comrade, thou tellst me that the puissant Sieur d’Entrailles disappeared during a great feast

and none of the guests or household knew of the manner of his going and whither he had gone; that he was last seen sitting at the board, and that he suddenly vanished, and none could tell how or whither. Either the noble lords and their attendants were drunken with too much wine, or it was the work of the evil one, or—thou liest."

"Nay, it was none of these three things."

"P-u-f-f!" was Iron Hand's brief but expressive reply.

"*Mordieu*, an' I'd show thee how 'twas done could I but get the keys of the great hall!"

"Why not?" asked Iron Hand.

"Twould take the cunning of the *diable* himself to get the keys from the seneschal's belt."

"If I'll get the keys wilt thou show me how this unlikely thing was done?"

"Certes," replied Ignace.

Iron Hand had reached the limit of his diplomacy, and all he could do for the present, at least, was to wait till he could repeat to Raoul the conversation he had had with Ignace, and leave further means of encompassing his escape to Raoul and to that fortune which ever favors the brave. The next time he was permitted to visit Raoul he told all he had learned.

It seemed a hopeless task even to attempt to get the keys of the room from the grim gray-haired seneschal. He was without kith or kin in this world, and

served the interests of his lord religiously, for there was none else to claim his care or thought. Yet there is a soft spot in every man's heart, if there be the proper one to find it, and the little maid of fourteen years, the sport of fortune, she who had been cast up by the sea, found the way to his.

When the young maid had sufficiently recovered to be able to leave her room, Iron Hand's services had been called into requisition to carry her down to the great hall where the household assembled for meals, and to the sunny spots on the walls where she could see the rugged, picturesque country of Brittany, and could watch the gleaming waters that sparkled and played in the warm spring sunshine.

And the Lady Ysobel learned to trust the clear-eyed giant who carried her so carefully and so gently, and ministered to her comfort so tenderly, in spite of his great strength and big body.

One day, instead of putting her down on her hassock on the sun-flooded wall, he carried her backward and forward behind the parapet, and told her how Raoul was languishing in prison because he had sworn to return her to her father, and how he was but awaiting his escape to fulfil his vow. But his escape seemed hopeless, for Raoul would not consent to tempt his keeper, whose life would be the forfeit were it discovered he had connived at his prisoner's escape. And had he been willing to try and bribe his keeper,

and had Ignace been corruptible, Raoul had nothing to offer him in return for his good services.

The demoiselle made Iron Hand repeat to her the whole story of her rescue, of the measures taken to exact Raoul's promise not to attempt to restore her to her father's arms, of the platform that could be let down from the banqueting hall into the cell where Raoul was confined, and of Ignace's promise to show how it was done if Iron Hand would but procure the keys of the banqueting hall for a brief space from the grim old warden.

The Lady Ysobel was silent for a few moments, busily thinking, then she said thoughtfully:

“ It would take some time to get the keys and then to seek Ignace so that he might lead the way to the banqueting room; and then, too, he might be absent.”

Then she was silent again for a brief period, her forehead puckered in thought. Presently she continued:

“ If I could get the keys, you could unlock the door and leave it ajar, returning the keys, and then at some convenient moment, when no one would be likely to disturb you, you could enter the chamber and look at things yourself.”

“ Ah, yes, damozel, but the difficulty is to get the keys.”

The Lady Ysobel did not answer, but set her wits to work to devise some means to secure the keys, or,

rather, first to see the room. She sought the company of the stern old seneschal, and brought all her pretty ways into play to win his regard and favor, till the heart of the grim old warrior succumbed to the wiles of the little maid, and he would stroke her soft dark hair that curled so prettily about her piquant face, and wish he had just so sweet a maid for daughter or granddaughter as she to solace his declining years.

And when the Lady Ysobel begged the boon of seeing the quaint old castle and all its locked-up apartments, and beguiled him into telling her tales of the dead and gone lords and ladies of the old Brittany château, to wile away the weary, tedious hours of convalescence, he yielded to her gentle importunities.

CHAPTER XIII.

OBTAINING THE KEYS.

One afternoon just after dinner, as the Lady Ysobel was yet weak from her recent illness, Iron Hand was told to carry her that she might without fatigue investigate the great château under the guidance of the old warden. She was first taken to the women's apartments and shown the châtelaine's private withdrawing-room with its tapestries, its velvet-covered couches, inlaid tables, curiously fashioned lamps; madame's distaff, her medicine closet, the drawers of bandages, salves, and unguents, just as the last lady of Esticourt had left it, and awaiting the occupancy of the new châtelaine, when it pleased their lord to bring her to his Brittany château. But as yet there was no madame, Sir Griffith being a bachelor.

They visited the dungeons, all save the one where Raoul was confined; for such sights as prisoners were not for a young maid's eyes to see and tender heart to grieve over. He would have passed by the torture-chamber, also, with a cursory remark, had she not insisted on entering; but when she saw the boots, the wheels, the racks, and all the other instruments de-

vised for man's punishment, her heart grew chill and faint with horror, and she cried to be taken away. Then they bore her to the armory, bright and gay with firelight and flash of steel, for one could scarcely tell whether the glancing gleams came from the forge whence rose the sparks under the armorer's hammer, or from the glinting shield and helmet and cuirass that hung upon the walls; and last they went into the great banqueting hall, now bare and gloomy, where the light came through the narrow opening in the thick walls that served as windows in fortress castles. The shadows lay thick upon the floor and walls, and Ysobel could scarce discern aught; even the great long table and chairs looked shadowy in the gray light. So she begged that a torch might be brought, and bade Iron Hand put her down while he fetched it, and then she slowly walked around the long table and paused at its head, where the lord's great carven chair stood, and looked closely on the floor at the right side of it, where the chair of the guest of honor was always placed; and when Iron Hand brought the smoking torch, she saw that the oaken floor, grown dark with use and age, looked lighter in color just under the chair of the chief guest, as if it had been repaired at some distant date. Within this lighter square was a smaller one that looked as though the oaken planks had been cut, and she called the attention of the seneschal to its peculiar appearance, and

asked the reason for it; but he made some vague answer, and said it was growing late and he was needed elsewhere, so they would go back to the living-room.

But Ysobel did not leave the spot; instead, she dropped a ring, and then bemoaned its loss; and sinking on her knees, bade Iron Hand hold the torch low down to the floor that she might find her ring. And she passed her hand all over the platform, seeking the secret spring, declaring all the while that she must find her ring, for it had been her dear dead mother's.

But the Lady Ysobel could not find the spring; and, at length, she said she had recovered her ring, and then she suffered Iron Hand to carry her away.

It was the talk of the household—the partiality of the old seneschal for the stranger maid. She would sit on the arm of his chair before the great fire in the broad open chimney—for fires were necessary in that great damp château on the cool spring evenings on the northern coast of France—and he would tell her the legends of the patron saint of Brittany, and stories of the lords of the château before Sir Griffith had come in possession; and how all the male members had died, leaving only a daughter to represent the house, who was married to a Southron; and how the fief had reverted to its overlord, the Duke of Brittany; and how the Breton duke, Jean III., had bestowed it upon the young free-lance just before his death; and

how Sir Griffith had supported the claim to the succession of the Compte de Montfort against that of the Compte de Blois; and how the brave and valiant dame Joan de Montfort, when her lord was taken prisoner and confined in the prison fortress of the Louvre—for the kings of France supported the claim of the Compte de Blois—fought to retain the dukedom for her son against the rival claimant.

He told how that doughty lady, “who had the courage of a man and the heart of a lion,” headed her forces and held the fortress until the arrival of aid from England, whose king espoused her cause. Then followed bloody deeds and bloody fights in which Sir Griffith had won his spurs.

The seneschal had given orders that the Lady Ysobel should be put in the apartments of the châtelaine, that her captivity might be rendered as light as possible until the return of the lord of the castle. He had unlocked chests of the departed dames of the Château d'Esticourt, wherein the young maid might find raiment that she might be comfortably and seemingly attired; he heaped her platter at meals with the choicest morsels; he caused a palfrey to be broken to her use, and took her out on long rides; in fact, he put the whole household under her orders, and she in turn beguiled him with her pretty ways, bright wit, and tuneful voice.

Late one evening he returned home weary and

hungry, for he had been in the saddle since early morning on business of his absent lord. Calling to a lad to pull off his long riding boots, he sank down heavily into a chair, for his years were beginning to tell upon him, and he was not able to endure fatigue even as well as ten years before. The weight of the great bunch of keys that hung from his leathern belt seemed burdensome, and he unclasped the belt, and let it drop with the keys on the floor beside him. Ysobel saw her opportunity. Gliding from her seat in the corner of the great fireplace, she came to the side of the chair where the keys lay, and stood by him, smoothing his long silken white hair back from his forehead, taking care that her long, flowing skirts should cover the keys. Under the light touch of her soft fingers the weary old man, leaning back in his high-backed chair, fell asleep. Ysobel motioned Iron Hand to approach.

“I am burning; a coal has fallen upon my dress,” she cried, and pointed to an ember that had shot out from the fire on the floor near her skirt. As Iron Hand stooped to extinguish the spark, she drew her skirt from off the keys, saying in quick, low tones:

“Take them, unlock the door of the banqueting hall, and return with them as speedily as possible, lest he wake and miss them.”

It was not a difficult feat to pick up the keys and conceal them under his doublet, for the fire gave

but an uncertain light, and the other occupants of the room were engaged, the men in their favorite pastime of throwing dice and the women in preparing the evening meal, so the withdrawal of Iron Hand was not noticed.

The minutes passed, and the evening meal was almost ready, yet Iron Hand did not return. Ysobel grew apprehensive lest the summons to supper should waken the seneschal before the keys were restored to the place where he had flung them.

The unaccustomed fingers of Iron Hand could not manage the lock. One key after another he tried, but none would work it. Great beads of sweat stood out upon his brow, and he went over the keys again, trying them all; some would not enter the lock, some turned around and around in it, and some were too short. The third time he tried them, and at last the lock yielded and the spring flew back. Leaving the door slightly ajar so that the spring could not catch, Iron Hand hurried back with the keys, trembling and panting, more frightened than he had ever been before.

Meantime, Ysobel softly but regularly stroked the brow of the sleeping man, furtively watching for Iron Hand's return. As the moments lengthened into the quarter, and the quarter to the half, her heart beat almost to suffocation, her fingers shook, and her breath came short and quick. The summons to supper

came, and Iron Hand did not return. The old warden stirred, stretched, and opened his eyes. He smiled as he saw Ysobel by his side, took her hand and patted it, and then prepared to rise.

But Ysobel, trembling with suppressed fear, gently pushed him back into his seat, and said playfully:

“Thou shalt not have a mouthful of food until thou’lt promise to tell me a long tale ere I retire.”

“Well, well, demoiselle, if I must, I must, but I must have meat first, for there’s naught but emptiness within, and my belt lies loose about me,” and he put his fingers to his waist to show how it had shrunken since breakfast, and found there was no belt there.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SEARCH FOR THE SPRING.

Ysobel's heart was in her throat. How was she to prevent the seneschal from discovering the loss of his keys? In her fright she clasped her little hands so tightly together as to leave the imprint of her nails on the white soft flesh. How could the missing keys be accounted for, and how could they be replaced without exciting surprise?

"Where's my belt?" asked the seneschal, looking on either side of his chair in perplexity.

"Thou hast lost it on thy ride home," said Ysobel, giving utterance to the first words that rose to her lips, continuing playfully, "and when thy lord returns he will ask for the keys of the castle. And the unfaithful servant will reply, 'Behold, my lord, I know not where they are; some sprite hath filched them from me.' And the lord will reply, 'Depart, thou unfaithful servant; thou art not to be trusted.'" But just then Iron Hand appeared in the doorway. When he saw that the seneschal was awake, he stood still and looked at Ysobel with staring eyes and fallen chin. His hands trembled so violently that they



shook the belt which he had concealed under his sleeve; he could hear the clinking of the keys. But the Lady Ysobel took no heed of him. Instead, she jumped from the arm of the chair, and stood over where the keys had lain, and opened her pretty mouth wide in a prolonged yawn, and stretched her slender white arms above her head, and declared she was sleepy and would depart to her bed without eating, all the while thinking how she could get Iron Hand by her in order to replace the stolen belt.

“But where are my keys?” asked the seneschal.

“Where thou hast dropped them, no doubt,” replied the young lady coolly. Then looking at the fire, she cried out:

“Come hither, Iron Hand, the fire-log has fallen; it needs thy strong hand to set it right.” As she spoke she swept aside her flowing skirts as if to make way for Iron Hand to pass, at the same time motioning him to lay the keys at her feet as he bent over to attend to the fire. As the keys left Iron Hand’s fingers they clanked together.

“What’s that?” asked the seneschal, springing to his feet.

“The keys,” replied Ysobel demurely, “just where thou didst lay them before sleeping.”

“Thou art a naughty damozel,” said the seneschal good-naturedly, thinking it but playfulness on the part of the girl’s not reminding him before that he

had taken his belt off and flung it on the floor before he slept.

After supper Ysobel insisted on having the seneschal tell her one of his many tales of how he had rescued his former lord from a plight, when, but for his aid, he would have perished. Ysobel was apparently paying the greatest heed to the story, but in reality she was thinking of that unlocked door.

The door was unlocked, it was true, but how were they to discover the secret spring that moved the machinery of the descending platform? Ysobel racked her brains to find the means. At length bedtime came with the problem still unsolved; sleep was banished by the torturing thought that, though the keys had been stolen and the door had been unlocked, the spring was yet unfound; neither was there any opportunity for her to visit the banqueting hall, for she was not left alone day or night, save when she sat on the sunlit wall a little while every sunny morning.

She did not dare ask to see the state apartment again, lest their design be suspected. Her heart ached for the solitary captive who languished in a dungeon cell because he had vowed to accomplish her rescue and to restore her to her father's care. Her heart ached also for her father, who had expected to see her, and who probably mourned her as dead. All night she lay thinking, trying to evolve some plan to discover the hidden spring.

Morning came; and heavy-eyed and heavy-hearted, Ysobel joined the household at the morning meal. Iron Hand was already seated at the board in his accustomed place. She took her usual seat beside the seneschal and tried to force down a few mouthfuls of food, but finding it impossible, she left the table and wandered out into the courtyard and watched the men bring out the horses for their morning gallop over the soft green sward outside the castle walls. She begged to be allowed to ride also, but the seneschal put her off with the promise to take her another day. Later Iron Hand found her on the wall, looking over the country where the verdure was fresh and green, and the trees were about to burst into leaf.

“Damozel,” said the giant, “I have found the hidden spring!” All dulness vanished from her face and languor from her limbs. She sprang to her feet, saying:

“Tell me at once.”

“Well, damozel, I could not sleep for thinking how to get at my young master, so before aught of the household was awake I went quietly into the hall to look for the spring. On all fours I looked and looked, and felt and felt, but could find nothing. At length I was ready to give up, for the morning was growing and I could hear the household stirring, and I was afraid I would be found there. So I was about to get up from my knees, but I had got a little way

under the table, and in straightening up I hit my head with such force against the table as to overturn it, and there, right in front of the lord's chair, where his feet would be were he sitting in it, was the spring. I pressed upon it and the platform began to descend; when I raised my hand the platform stood still. I did not dare let it go down far, lest Ignace see it when he takes food to my young master. So there the platform is, neither up nor down, and if any one go into the chamber all will be lost."

"We must escape to-night," declared the young girl. "Thou must see Maître Raoul and prepare him for his rescue at midnight." Then she paused, "But when he is out of the dungeon how are we to pass the walls?"

"I have thought of that, damozel; I know not, unless I kill the doorkeeper."

"No, no, thou must not kill any one. Let me think. See thy master; bid him be prepared to make his escape to-night."

When Iron Hand left Ysobel he asked permission of the seneschal to visit Raoul. It was granted, and he disclosed their plans to the captive.

"When you hear a low whistle you must lie flat so as not to be struck by the platform as it descends. Then wait till we tell you what to do further."

After Iron Hand's departure with a promise to return later in the day, Raoul paced his narrow cell,

thinking of the future. During the weeks of his solitary confinement he had had ample time to mature his plans; but now that the final moment had come, there were details to be arranged and contingencies to be provided for that a maid of fourteen and a man whose force lay in his muscles rather than in his brains could not be expected to manage.

Raoul was but a boy himself, scarcely more than sixteen, but in those days of storm and stress and strife men matured early, and circumstances had ripened Raoul's judgment, though they had robbed him of the memory of his former life. But strong stirrings of memory were agitating his mind, especially since his imprisonment. Long had visions appeared to him in his dreams of a golden-haired, blue-eyed woman whose face beamed with motherly tenderness and whose lips smiled with motherly fondness. Raoul believed her to be his guardian angel. There also appeared to him, but more seldom, the apparition of a heavily bearded man clad in mail; and the château life seemed familiar to him, but not the great expanse of ocean and long stretch of beach. Sylvan dales, rolling plains, and undulating hills passed before him in his visions; and when he felt the spring of his horse beneath him, or the javelin in his hand, there came glimmers of a former existence, and his heart leaped within his bosom, but his brain clouded over again. Sometimes he almost believed

that he were a heavenly messenger specially chosen for a certain work, then again he feared he had sinned in some higher life and was suffering the pangs of purification. And when troubled beyond endurance, he ventured to speak of his misgivings to the chaplain, Père Joseph, he was bidden fast and pray, and to beware the wiles of the tempter.

Thus Raoul had been leading a dual life, a life of unreality and a life of stern reality, and now confronted by the hazard of escape, by the dangers of the open country without friends or money, his heart grew heavy. Yet he faltered not in his determination to restore the maid to her home.

Iron Hand returned to Raoul's cell. He told him that a messenger had arrived that morning, saying that Sir Griffith, Sieur d'Esticourt, would arrive within a few days, and the seneschal said if Raoul would promise to abide his coming before making any attempt to restore the Lady Ysobel to her father, he should be released at once.

The seneschal bade Iron Hand tell Raoul that he was acting the part of a good friend to him in trying to have him leave the matter to their lord. He did not wish to have Raoul prejudice Sir Griffith against him, for he was a likely youth, who, with the favor of a powerful lord like their master, would win his way to good fortune. Should he anger the sieur, however, all prospect of his favor was ended. No doubt,

Sir Griffith would restore the demoiselle to her father without ransom on his return.

But Raoul was young and headstrong. He doubted the clemency of Sir Griffith now that he knew of the practice of luring vessels to their destruction by means of decoy fires, a practice which evidently received the sanction of the Sieur d'Esticourt; so the knowledge that the sieur expected soon to return made Raoul all the more determined to try to effect their escape that very night. He told Iron Hand to say to the seneschal he could not give his answer that evening, but that he should know it in the morning. And then he gave Iron Hand his instructions. He bade him ask the Lady Ysobel to make a rope of the hangings of her chamber, or of her bedclothes, telling Iron Hand to give her a sharp knife to cut the heavy drapery into strips; when cut and knotted, and when the household had retired, to put the rope outside her door, together with the apparel she would need for the journey. Iron Hand was to get Raoul's *jongleur* suit of blue and gold; for the youth had resolved to act the rôle of a wandering minstrel during their flight to Clermont. At midnight Iron Hand was to lead the Lady Ysobel to the banqueting hall, let down the platform, first opening the trap-door.

"What shalt thou do for a light, for thou canst not work in the darkness?" asked Raoul.

"We'll break the chain that holds the lamp in the

armory, and take the lamp to light us in the hall; elsewhere the moon well serve us. Praise be to the saints! the moon is full."

"Ah!" sighed Raoul, "it will be good to see the sunlight or moonlight again; it is but little light I get here. 'Tis six weeks since I have breathed the air outside these narrow walls."

"Thou'l soon have enough, for to-night thou shalt be free," replied Iron Hand. He was called away a few moments later.

The long hours dragged on. Impatiently Raoul watched the shadows as they lengthened across the walls and floor of his cell, for day came late and went early in that stone-lined dungeon. It seemed hours between the passing of day and the coming of his evening meal, and between the evening meal and midnight.

On his bed of straw he waited and watched and listened. He could hear the rats as they scurried about his cell in quest of the remains of his meals; he heard all the strange sounds of night in a great château that had settled with age, and it seemed sometimes as if he could hear faint whisperings overhead.

But the time passed, and no signal came. He trembled with suspense; the night was waning, the precious moments fleeing, the moments he had hoped would bring his freedom. Their plans had been thwarted. Yes, the day seemed about to break, for

his cell was growing brighter. With a groan, he buried his face in his arms. He had given up hope.

He heard a faint sound, but paid no heed to it. He had been deceived too often and disappointed too sorely. It was repeated; then he heard his name whispered. He listened intently, and distinguished Iron Hand's voice; then came a low whistle followed by a bird-call.

Raoul aroused himself. He heard a creaking and clinking of chains. Looking upward, he saw a square patch of light. Springing to his feet, he stood right under it, for the platform was descending and the trap-door in the middle of it had been raised. When it descended within his reach, he put up both hands and drew himself upon the platform. But it continued to descend until it touched the floor of his cell, and there it remained, with Raoul on it, stationary at the bottom of the shaft.

In vain he attempted to push the platform upward; he might as well have attempted to raise a horse. He called to them to throw him a rope that he might pull himself up, but he received no answer. He could hear them moving about overhead; he even saw a faint light, and then the light grew dimmer, as if they were carrying it away. He was afraid to call aloud lest he arouse some of the occupants of the château; he did not know but that Iron Hand had been surprised and that the seneschal had appeared upon the scene, which

would have effectually put an end to any escape on his part from the château. His suspense grew unbearable. He called, but received no answer. Time was passing. It seemed to him as if morning had already come. Something surely must have happened to thwart their plans. Was disappointment always to be his fate? Again he waited for a word from Iron Hand, but none came. All was still above. They had evidently departed from the banqueting hall.

CHAPTER XV.

AN EVENTFUL NIGHT.

Iron Hand communicated Raoul's instructions to the Lady Ysobel as soon as he left the cell. Immediately after the midday meal the Lady Ysobel withdrew to her apartment. As she was not left alone day or night, she was obliged to devise some means of freeing herself from the attentions of her waiting-woman. She had hardly closed the door of her chamber ere Jechanne appeared.

"Do leave me alone!" cried the young lady irritably. "My head aches and I want rest and quiet."

"Shall I not bring my young lady a tisane?" asked the young woman in concern.

"No, no, leave me in peace till supper time. I shall try to sleep."

Never had the naturally truthful girl uttered such a falsehood, for never had she less intention of sleeping than at that moment, but she mentally registered a vow to do penance for her sin at the first convenient moment. Extraordinary occasions require extraordinary means, was the reflection with which she tried to appease her protesting conscience.

The first thing was to make the rope.

"The idea of tearing down these hangings and cutting them into strips! It would be discovered as soon as Jehanne entered the room, and then there would be a great hue and cry."

There were several oak chests in the chamber that contained the wearing apparel of the departed dames of Esticourt. There were garments of wool and samite, and of silk and velvet, but at the bottom of one of the chests was something that better served her purpose; it was a roll of homespun containing over twelve yards of cloth. With a cry of satisfaction the Lady Ysobel drew it out, and then replacing everything else in the chests, she proceeded to make the rope. She cut up a long silken scarf into strips, and after twisting the cloth as tightly as she could, she bound it around with the silken strips. It was a hard task for those delicate fingers, but she completed it, though they ached almost to breaking ere it was done. Ysobel had the blood of the staunch old crusaders in her veins, and bleeding fingers and aching hands could not frighten her away from her task.

It was supper time when the rope was finished. It was a strong, stout rope of nearly forty feet in length. She concealed it behind the arras, and then rebraiding her long hair and readjusting her flowing robes with the long open sleeves that showed the round white arms, she descended to the common room.



Her weary eyes and pale, tired face called forth expressions of sympathy from some of the members of the household, whom Jehanne had informed of her young mistress's illness. The liveliness of the dark-haired, dark-eyed girl, with her gentle humor and her cheerfulness under captivity, had endeared her to seneschal and scullion, man-at-arms and waiting-maid, for she had a winning smile and a playful word for every one, no matter how humble the station.

The household retired at the usual hour. Ysobel sat in the deep embrasure that served as a window in her turret chamber, gazing thoughtfully over the surrounding country, that lay flooded in an ocean of moonlight. Her heart was heavy with forebodings at what was before her. It was a hazardous undertaking, this escape, for a youth of sixteen, a maid of fourteen, and a peasant.

Jehanne was waiting to prepare her young mistress for bed. But Ysobel bade her seek her rest and to leave her undisturbed, saying that her heart was aching with homesickness, and sleep was far from her eyes. When she was ready for bed she would disrobe without aid.

It was with difficulty that Ysobel could prevail on the faithful handmaiden to sleep while her mistress watched. But Jehanne was young and healthy, and sleep came readily, as ere long there was audible evidence.

Ysobel spoke her name, at first in low tones, and then louder. Jehanne stirred on her mattress of straw at the foot of her mistress's couch, but did not awaken. Then Ysobel arose and began preparations for flight.

A pale light came from the Etruscan lamp that was suspended by a bronze chain from the ceiling, a lamp that had found its way from Italy into La Provence, thence into the possession of Sir Griffith, who had brought it northward to light the gloomy apartments of the Château d'Esticourt. Sir Griffith had acquired the habits of luxury from his sojourn in the sunny south, and had furnished his château of the north in a manner that was a wonder to the young girl, who was accustomed to ruder accommodations.

Unhooking the lamp from its chain, she carried it to the door, first pausing to listen. All was silent in the corridor. She set the lamp down behind the door that its light could shine out upon the corridor, and waited with beating heart and suspended breath. Yes, a dim ray pierced the gloom beyond; footsteps could be faintly distinguished. Was it Iron Hand or the warden?

The suspense was oppressing her. But the light grew brighter; there came a form that towered to what in the shadow seemed to be supernatural proportions. It was the giant form of Iron Hand, who carried a lamp in his hand and a small pack upon his back.

Without a word Ysobel glided back into her room, dragged her rope from under the arras toward the door. Jehanne moved uneasily upon her bed. Ysobel stood still as a statue until she heard the breathing grow deep and regular again. Then she picked the rope up in her arms and staggered with her burden to the door, where Iron Hand awaited her. He took it from those slender arms. The rope once in his possession, she felt it to be safe. Returning, she threw about her a long cloak that completely enveloped her form, and tying a scarf about her head, she was ready for her midnight journey.

After extinguishing her lamp they went down the corridor, the rays of Iron Hand's lamp making a little island of light in an ocean of blackness. On they stole, the soft leather shoes of Lady Ysobel making no sound, while Iron Hand was in his bare feet.

Through the corridor they crept to the door of the banqueting hall. It yielded to Iron Hand's touch, and they found themselves within the great apartment, the moonlight showing faintly through the narrow casements. Stealing along to the table, Iron Hand pressed the spring under it with his foot, and the platform began to move downward. Iron Hand called to Raoul, but received no answer. He whistled, and this time came a response.

Down descended the platform, the trap-door opening as it began to descend. They peered down the

well-like hole, and could just distinguish Raoul's form as he drew himself up by his hands onto the platform. Still it descended. It reached the floor of the cell and then stopped.

In vain Iron Hand pressed the spring of the platform; it would not ascend. Again and again he raised and depressed the crank that moved the spring, but it apparently had done its work.

He lay at full length upon the floor and stretched his hands down to Raoul, hoping to lift him up. But try as he might, Raoul could not reach the down-stretched hands. In his efforts to seize hold of Raoul, Iron Hand almost fell headforemost into the shaft. They talked in suppressed tones, trying to solve the problem of how to get him out.

"Throw me the rope if you have one," whispered Raoul.

"*Mordieu!* why didn't I think of that before?" grunted Iron Hand.

He jumped to his feet to get the rope. The Lady Ysobel was still feeling about the floor for another spring. As she moved backward on her knees her foot struck the crank with considerable force, and it sprang way back on the other side. Immediately the platform began to ascend, and in a moment Raoul stood beside them.



CHAPTER XVI.

A LONG JOURNEY.

A little later the three fugitives were making their way down the stone steps of the castle to the courtyard, across the courtyard to the wall, and up the stone steps that led to the watch-tower above.

Iron Hand tied one end of the rope around Raoul's body, under the arms, and lowered him over the parapet. Ysobel followed in the same way, Raoul receiving her as she came within reach of his arms.

Looking about him for something to which he could fasten the rope in order that he also might descend, Iron Hand could find nothing, for the parapet presented a smooth surface save where pierced by loopholes, which were too far apart to permit of fastening the rope through them. On account of his weight Iron Hand would be obliged to double the rope.

The time was fast passing. Already the eastern horizon was showing faint traces of light. The faithful giant bade Raoul and Ysobel depart without him. This they refused to do. Growing desperate, Iron Hand tore up one of the stone steps that led to the

watch-tower, carried it to a loophole, set it up across the opening and drew the rope around the stone, passed the ends through the loophole, let himself over the parapet, seized the rope doubled, and slid down, drawing the rope after him.

But their difficulties were not yet surmounted, for the ditch lay between them and freedom. The gate, of course, was closed and the drawbridge up, so that there seemed to be no way of crossing the moat. But Iron Hand's strength again served them well.

Lying prone on the ground,

" . . . extended long and large,
In bulk as huge
As whom fables name of monstrous size,"

he seized Raoul about the body; propelled himself, with Raoul in his arms, over the moat slowly and surely, until Raoul's outstretched hands could grasp the bushes growing around a tree-stump.

Iron Hand bade the Lady Ysobel cross the ditch upon their bodies, which she did, running swiftly but surely over this human bridge.

Then Raoul carefully drew himself on the bank, Iron Hand meanwhile withdrawing backward till he held Raoul by the feet, then simultaneously Raoul sprang up on one side, while Iron Hand with a backward, sidelong spring threw himself onto the opposite bank.

But how was Iron Hand to cross? The doughty peasant was not yet at the end of his resources. He flung one end of the rope to Raoul, who passed it around the stump, the Lady Ysobel holding it firmly in place, while Raoul flung the other end back to Iron Hand. The two ends the giant then secured to an upright beam of the drawbridge, making the doubled rope lie taut across the ditch. Whether it would bear the strain of Iron Hand's whole weight, to which it had not been subjected when he slid down on it from the wall above, was yet to be seen. But there was no other alternative.

Grasping the rope with both hands, Iron Hand pulled himself along until he was off the ground; then twisting his legs about the rope, he slowly made his way over. The rope stretched under the heavy strain, and more than once the hearts of the anxious watchers failed them ere the faithful fellow succeeded in drawing his length on the opposite bank.

Their way then was comparatively easy. But day was breaking, and almost a hundred and fifty miles lay between them and their destination, the château of the Sieur de Clermont being situated on the other side of Tours. Picking the girl up in his arms, Iron Hand set out with his long, swift strides, Raoul almost running by his side in order to keep up with him. In this manner they made many miles before

the sun had risen high in the heavens. They did not fear pursuit till long after sun-up, for Iron Hand had taken the precaution of throwing the rope in the ditch, so that the inmates of the château should have no clue as to the manner of their escape; consequently time would be lost in hunting throughout the château, courtyard, and stables for the fugitives. But it would not be long ere the seneschal would send out a search party, and it was impossible to conceal their identity on account of the unusual size of Iron Hand. Therefore it were better that he should be seen as little as possible. Again Iron Hand proved his usefulness, for his familiarity with the country thereabouts served them well. That part of France is honeycombed with caves, the underground dwellings of some extinct people. To one of these Iron Hand conveyed the Lady Ysobel, and there they remained secluded the rest of the day.

Raoul left them, promising to return before night with a supply of food. Arraying himself in his suit of blue and gold, he set out for the nearest market-place. There he entertained the people with songs and recitations, until he had collected enough silver and copper pieces to pay for their food until the next day. He returned with the provisions to his companions in the cave. At nightfall they resumed their journey and covered thirty miles, following the river. It was a memorable journey, for wolves prowled at

night, obliging them to keep a sharp lookout. Iron Hand carried the Lady Ysobel part of the way, but she insisted at intervals on walking.

It was early morning when they reached Nantes. Here Raoul sought an inn and begged the landlady to give his sister a bed, saying the party with whom they had been travelling had been set upon by bandits, and the three had just escaped with their lives. He was obliged to account in some plausible way for the fact of a lady travelling alone with a youth and a peasant. The Lady Ysobel's weary face and the sight of Raoul's silver appealed to both the heart and pocket of the innkeeper, and she took the young girl at once to an upper chamber, while Iron Hand and Raoul lay on benches beside the kitchen fire.

After a few hours' sleep Raoul again went to the market-place, this time accompanied by Iron Hand, and they reaped a comparatively rich harvest of small coins, for Iron Hand's feats of prodigious strength won not only the plaudits of the crowd, but also all its spare coins.

With his newly acquired money Raoul paid for the passage of the Lady Ysobel, Iron Hand, and himself in one of the *vaisseaux* that plied between Nantes and Tours, repeating the story that he had told the landlady at Nantes.

It was a slow journey up the Loire, as they were dependent upon the wind and tide. The hearts of the

three fugitives were heavy with apprehension, for they feared pursuit and capture.

Indeed, the third morning of their river journey they beheld a company of horsemen galloping along the banks of the Loire toward Tours. And Raoul was sure that he beheld the colors and pennons of Sir Griffith, with the old seneschal himself riding at the head.

Raoul felt comparatively secure on board the boat, for the old warden would not think of seeking them there, knowing that they had left the château without money with which to pay their passage. It was when they landed at Tours that he felt their peril lay, for there they had to leave the river and strike across country into the duchy of Orléannois.

So Raoul conducted the young lady to an inn down by the river side, and confided their whole story to the innkeeper and his wife. They told him it was too late to attempt to reach the lord of Clermont that night, that the landlady would care for the demoiselle, and the first thing in the morning he could take a horse and start for the village of Clermont, that lay twenty miles away.

The next morning they met at breakfast. After giving the innkeeper and his wife strict injunctions not to allow the demoiselle to be seen, lest she be abducted, and bidding Iron Hand keep guard over her, Raoul set out for Clermont. He did not care to ven-

ture into the open country with the Lady Ysobel lest they be waylaid by English or Navarrese freebooters or a searching party from the Château d'Esticourt.

Taking his way across the plains, he reached the château soon after noon. He blew a shrill blast upon a horn he had procured at Tours, and in a few moments the warden appeared in the watch-tower overhead and asked his name and business.

"I am here to speak with the Sieur de Clermont, and am an envoy from his daughter."

The drawbridge was immediately lowered, and Raoul was conducted at once to the Sieur de Clermont. He was a noble-looking man of about forty, but already his hair was silvered, while a scar extended half across his face. When Raoul's business was made known to him this man of a hundred battles, who knew not fear, trembled and sunk back into his chair because his legs refused to bear him.

Raoul told his story as briefly as possible, and asked that an escort be sent to convey the Lady Ysobel to her home. Not many minutes passed ere a small body of horsemen emerged from under the portcullis and clattered across the drawbridge, headed by the Sieur de Clermont and Raoul. They made their way as quickly as possible to Tours and to the inn where the Lady Ysobel had been left in charge of Iron Hand, to find that the seneschal and his party had preceded them!

CHAPTER XVII.

THE PURSUIT.

The company of horsemen which the fugitives had seen and believed to be a pursuing party from the Château d'Esticourt was indeed the seneschal and a dozen of his men. When Lady Ysobel's waiting-woman found that her young mistress was not in her chamber the morning following the flight, she supposed that the young girl had wakened early and gone below. But when she did not appear to partake of the light repast her maid prepared for her (for breakfast was but a scanty meal in France in those days as well as at the present time) she became a little uneasy. Iron Hand was missed also; but no one took heed of his absence until it was discovered that Raoul's cell was empty, and that he, too, had disappeared.

Then it was known that an escape had been attempted. As the great iron-bound massive doors were still locked, it was at first believed that the fugitives were somewhere within the château walls. A careful search was made, but no trace of the three could be found. In vain they looked for the means

by which Raoul had managed to leave his cell; as the stones that lined his cell were all in place, he could not have tunnelled his way out. The platform ceiling was in position, and as no one knew about the secret of the spring, save the seneschal, he never supposed for a moment that it had been discovered by any of the fugitives.

However he may have escaped from his cell, the fact of Raoul's disappearance was certain, as was also the fact that none of the three missing ones was within the castle walls. All the morning they searched the château from top to bottom wherever the fugitives could possibly have access. The turrets surmounting the walls were visited, the stables were ransacked, old rubbish was cleared away lest they had hidden behind it, the chapel was searched. Even the torture-room, as well as the banqueting hall, was visited, though all were locked and the seneschal carried the keys on his belt. After it was clearly proved that the fugitives had really succeeded in passing the walls, the seneschal and his men went all over the ground between the walls and the moat, for surely they must be in hiding somewhere about, as they could not have crossed the moat without the aid of planks or bridge.

In vain they hunted. They even searched the cliffs on the side of the sea, where the moat ended, but no vestige was to be seen of them. Then the seneschal concluded they must have fallen into the moat, and he

ordered the ditch to be dragged. All that was brought up by the grappling hooks was the rope that Lady Ysobel had made. Not till then did the seneschal take to his horse and order a dozen of his men to accompany him. It was now near night. The fugitives had a clear start of fifteen or sixteen hours, but as they were on foot and the château party had taken the fleetest steeds in the stables, the seneschal had not the slightest idea but that they would soon overtake them.

But mile after mile was passed without trace or clue of them. Inquiry was made principally concerning a peasant giant, whom no one could have seen without remarking and remembering. All the time, however, the fugitives were hiding in the cave, Raoul alone showing himself, and as the performance of a *jongleur* was a very common occurrence, no one thought of speaking of it. Consequently, the pursuing party reached Nantes ahead of the fugitives. That town was thoroughly searched, the seneschal believing they would attempt to hide within its narrow streets.

The party separated and visited every château and village in the vicinity whither it was possible for the three fugitives to reach on foot. But no news could they get of them.

And so the first and second days after the escape of Lady Ysobel and her companions passed. That night the pursuing party slept, for they had been without sleep for thirty-six hours; and that same night the

runaways traversed the short distance that lay between their last hiding-place and Nantes.

Having searched Nantes so thoroughly, the seneschal did not visit the inn again, and while the escaping party were refreshing themselves for the next night's journey, and Raoul and Iron Hand were seeking small coins by amusing the people about the market-place, their pursuers went on their way toward Tours.

By taking passage on one of the river boats that plied between Nantes and Tours, they had avoided meeting the seneschal on his homeward journey; for on finding no signs of the fugitives, the seneschal had concluded that they were in hiding nearer home. But on reaching Nantes again, he received the first news of the runaways. Then he heard of a great giant of a fellow who had performed prodigious feats of strength in the market-place, and of a slight handsome youth who had sung and recited for them.

“They cannot escape us now. We shall soon have them!” exclaimed the seneschal. “Then shall both varlet and churl be placed in the darkest cell of the donjon for their contumacy. The maid also shall be kept in strict seclusion until my lord's return, when he will find what to do with them all.”

Stopping to refresh themselves by a hearty meal, the seneschal and his party retraced their way to Tours, which they reached the morning after Raoul

and his companions had landed and sought hospitality at the inn.

Iron Hand was sitting on a bench outside the inn door. Much travelling and the soft sunshine had made the great fellow sleepy, and instead of keeping watch lest he be surprised by the pursuing party, he let his eyes drop, his chin fall, his head nod; and the next thing he was conscious of was a violent jerk and a tightness about his body. He attempted to spring to his feet, but found himself surrounded by his former comrades of the Château d'Esticourt, his arms pinioned to his sides, and his legs bound together by a stout rope. In spite of his immense strength, he was powerless. Bound hand and foot, he was carried by four men to the stable back of the inn, thrown upon the floor, and the door locked upon him.

The sound of the struggle had brought the inn-keeper and his wife to the door. They soon surmised that the company were in pursuit of the young maid confided to their care, so the woman went quickly to Lady Ysobel's chamber, and bade the maiden follow her at once, for the enemy was after her.

"Where is Iron Hand?" asked Ysobel, almost fainting with terror.

"They have bound him hand and foot and nearly killed him besides," answered the woman. "Come quickly, damozel, so they do not get you also."

Then the woman opened a panel in the wall, and

squeezing herself through, told Ysobel to follow. She made her way quickly through a narrow passage, down stone steps until they reached an underground chamber, where the innkeeper kept his choicest wines and hid his produce in order that all his substance might not be extorted in form of taxes.

The chamber was dark and damp, and Ysobel begged the innkeeper's wife not to leave her alone in that terrible place. But Annette said she must go back and shut the panel, or their hiding-place would be discovered, and she would be missed, and there would be a great ado made over her absence; and, besides, her husband would never know what to say.

Annette got back none too soon, for already the seneschal had entered the kitchen and demanded the Lady Ysobel.

“ My good man,” said he to Jacques, the innkeeper, “ bring hither the young lady who is lodging here.”

Before Jacques had time to reply, his wife stood in front of him, and courtesying to the seneschal, said:

“ Ah! messire, she is gone; I cannot find her. Is it that messire is her father? *Le bon Dieu ayez pitié à vous.*”

“ No words, woman; bring hither the demoiselle.”

“ *Hélas, messire, c'est impossible.* If *la petite dame* is no more here how can I bring her to you?”

“ Produce her at once; else will I pull down the roof over thy head, for she is hidden here within.”

"*Hélas!* messire, it is not that I will not; it is that I cannot."

But the seneschal did not stop to listen to her. He proceeded to search the whole inn, opening every door, peering into every closet, looking into every nook and cranny.

"There is a hidden room somewhere," he said. He measured the space between walls and between floors, but there seemed no space that could not be accounted for.

"I know the maid is in the house, else Iron Hand would not have been here. I shall find her here. What ho, there! Bring the axes," he said to his men, who stood outside in the courtyard. Then Annette became frightened, and she sent her husband to the magistrate's house to ask for protection. The magistrate himself speedily came down to the inn to find what the trouble was.

The seneschal told his story: how a young maid had been abducted by two varlets whom his lord, the puissant Welsh knight, Sir Griffith, had succored, and who would wreak his vengeance on the people of Tours if his ward were not forthcoming.

"How know you, messire, that the maid is here?"

"Because I have tracked her so far, and also the innkeeper has not denied that she is here, messire le justice."

"The woman has hidden her?"

Annette by this time was crying. The magistrate turned to her.

“Is it true that the maid is here?” he said sternly.

But the woman did not answer.

He repeated the question.

Still no answer.

“She must be made to speak,” said the magistrate.

“Here, some one take off her sabots and hold the soles of her feet to the fire. That method has been known to loosen tied-up tongues before.”

Two men seized Annette, pulled off her sabots, and held her feet to the fire. She bore the pain in silence for a few moments, then she shrieked and begged and prayed, but would not answer.

“Hold her feet closer,” commanded the magistrate.

At length she could endure the agony no longer. The flesh on the soles of her feet was already blistered.

“Listen, messires, I will tell you all.”

“Seat her on the bench,” said the magistrate.

At that moment a clattering of horses’ hoofs was heard in the street outside the courtyard.

The commotion in the courtyard prevented Annette’s revelation. The magistrate advanced to the door and threw it open. At the threshold he encountered the Sieur de Clermont.

“My lord of Clermont,” he said, and stepped aside in order that the newcomer might enter.

The Sieur de Clermont scarcely acknowledged the

magistrate's salutation, so eager was he to see his daughter.

"Where is the Lady Ysobel, my daughter?" he asked, looking about from one face to another. As no one responded he turned to Raoul, who had followed him into the room.

"The Lady Ysobel was here when I left, my lord. What hast thou done with her, good woman?" he asked of the innkeeper's wife.

"*Que Dieu soit beni*, Maître Raoul, that you have returned. *Voyez!*" and she held out her blistered feet for his inspection.

"My poor woman, who has been treating thee so cruelly?" exclaimed Raoul.

"*Ce messire là*," she answered, pointing to the magistrate, "because I would not deliver the demoiselle to that messire with the sombre mien. *Dame*, but his looks were enough to frighten the poor demoiselle. But I have hidden her, Maître Raoul."

"Is it true, messire le compte," asked the magistrate deferentially, "that the young demoiselle whom this gentleman is seeking is your daughter?"

"It is so, messire le justice," responded the count. "I should like to know why you have permitted this good woman to be tortured."

"It is a misunderstanding, messire le compte. I ask pardon. It is a mistake. This messire said the demoiselle was his ward, who had been abducted by a

varlet and a peasant. I but used my authority to enable him to recover his own."

"Use your authority, messire le justice, henceforward in a better cause. But, my good woman, bring hither my daughter."

"*Mais, messire le compte, how can I walk with my poor feet?*"

"Ah, *pauvre femme!* But thou shalt be rewarded for thy bravery. Thou shalt have a bright gold piece for every blister upon thy feet. Send some one to fetch the Lady Ysobel."

While they were talking the seneschal quietly left the kitchen, and signalling to his men outside in the street who awaited him, they were on their horses and on the road toward Nantes before their departure was observed. The Sieur de Clermont was too anxious to secure his daughter to pay any attention to the seneschal, who had been simply doing his duty.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE CHÂTEAU CLERMONT AND THE LADY BLANCHE.

Meanwhile the Lady Ysobel had been in an agony of apprehension. She heard the men overhead, and the shrieks of Annette, whom she supposed was being murdered; she heard also the tramp of many feet, the clank of steel, the clatter of hoofs, and the jingle of spurs. She had not dared move from the spot where Annette had left her. The place was pitchy darkness. She knew not what yawning abyss might lie either side, and she heard the squealing and scampering of rats. Finally her terror became unbearable. She was tempted to scream, thinking to return to Brittany with the seneschal were better than to endure that living death a moment longer. But when she opened her mouth no sound would come. She could not scream. Her limbs seemed paralyzed; they refused to hold her trembling body.

When she was at length found by her father, she lay unconscious on the cellar bottom, and a look of horror seemed frozen on her face. It was many hours ere she was brought back to consciousness. When she opened her eyes and saw her father bending over

her, she did not recognize him. She shrieked and covered her eyes with her hands.

“Iron Hand, Iron Hand,” she cried, “don’t let them take me!”

Her call for Iron Hand first made them remember the peasant giant, who had lain bound and gagged all these hours. After they had pacified Ysobel, and she had at length recognized her father and found comfort and healing in his arms, they began a hunt for Iron Hand. He was soon discovered. His joy at seeing Raoul and Lady Ysobel safe and sound was unbounded, though he felt covered with shame at the thought of his allowing the seneschal’s men to get the better of him because he failed in keeping his watch.

It was too late to start for Château de Clermont that night, so they all remained at the inn to sleep. In the morning the Sieur de Clermont asked Raoul and Iron Hand how best he might reward them for their faithful and efficient service to him and his daughter.

Raoul disclaimed all thought of reward, saying he felt he had participated, though unwittingly, in luring the vessel that carried the Lady Ysobel to destruction, and the least that he could do was to return her to her father’s protection.

“But thou shalt be rewarded and also thy man, Iron Hand. Come to my château and I will give you both a goodly sum of gold.”

“Take us rather into my lord’s service,” said Iron Hand. “*Ma foi!* it’s somewhere we have to go, since we have given the slip to Château d’Esticourt. My lord, Sir Griffith, will regard us with but little favor now. Indeed, my lord, that were the best reward, if it be your will and pleasure.”

“Faith, gladly will I receive you into my service. More faithful and loyal attendants could no sieur have.” And so it came to pass that both noble and lowly born, though neither was less noble in character, became members of the household of the Sieur de Clermont.

The household of the Sieur de Clermont was a very different one from Sir Griffith’s. In the château on the Brittany coast there were no ladies of gentle birth until the coming of Lady Ysobel, who was but a girl. There the life was hardy, rude, and somewhat monotonous. During the winter they seldom went outside the castle walls save to exercise the horses; while in Château de Clermont there were bear-hunts by day-time and wolf-hunts by night. In these the ladies did not join, but remained at home anxiously awaiting the return of the huntsmen to tell of their successes and threatened perils. But there was one outdoor sport in which the ladies of the household of the Sieur de Clermont engaged, and that was falconry, in which sport the ladies took as active a part as the men.

They also watched the pages and squires at their

games, all of which were designed to strengthen the muscles, quicken the sight, and harden the flesh. Often would they see contests of skill, and the Lady Ysobel or the Lady Blanche, the niece of the Sieur de Clermont, would bestow the guerdon upon the prize-winner.

Beside the stable-folk, house servants, artisans, chaplain, pages, squires, and men-at-arms, the household consisted of Dame Marie-Anne, nurse of the Lady Ysobel, and who supervised the female portion of the *ménage*, and who also had largely looked after her lord's interests when he was absent on field of battle since the death of the châtelaine soon after the Lady Ysobel's birth; the Lady Ysobel herself, and Lady Blanche, the only daughter of the Sieur de Charleroi, the dead brother of the Sieur de Clermont.

According to feudal customs, the fief of any lord who died without male heir reverted to the over-lord. If the dead lord left an unmarried daughter, the fief was commonly bestowed upon a bachelor knight, together with the hand of the lady. The Duke of Orleans had in his suite a favorite knight, called Sir Guy de Nesle, whose fortunes he wished to advance, so he offered him the lady and the land. The young gentleman, who had seen the Lady Blanche, was almost as anxious to have the lady as the land, for she was a maiden whom any knight might be proud to

marry; but she refused to accept Sir Guy de Nesle for a husband, though she said he might have the lands and welcome.

The contemptuous dislike displayed by the young woman nettled the young knight not a little, for he was not accustomed to being slighted by the fair sex; and, worse than all, it drew upon him the raillyery of his associates; so he vowed, willing or unwilling, the Lady Blanche should become his wife.

The Lady Blanche was a young woman who knew her own mind, like the illustrious lady after whom she was named, *la reine Blanche*, the mother of Louis IX., surnamed the Saint on account of his many virtues. Immediately after her father's death she had been conducted to her uncle's château, there to remain until she should marry. The Sieur de Clermont used every means in his power to induce his niece to obey their overlord. He confined her to her own chamber, threatened her with corporal punishment, and even swore that she should marry Sir Guy de Nesle or enter a convent. He could not and would not defy the commands of the Duke of Orleans, to whom he paid homage for his fief, by harboring so recalcitrant a vassal. When he found threats were of no avail with the perverse girl, he besought the duke not to insist on the marriage, offering to place his niece in a convent if he insisted, though the maid was ill suited to a life of retirement. But the duke said so long

as the lady was content to give the fief without her hand, he would insist upon nothing more.

The oath of Sir Guy de Nesle had been repeated to Lady Blanche, but she laughed it to scorn, saying it would take a man to capture the Lady Blanche, and to a man alone would she give her hand; not a mere puppet of fortune, who received as gifts other persons' possessions instead of winning them by his own valor. He who would despoil a maid of her inheritance at another's behest was no fitting mate for her.

One of the favorite pastimes of the Sieur de Clermont was falconing, a sport keenly enjoyed by Lady Blanche also. On many a bright morning a gay party, mounted on swift palfreys, clattered over the drawbridge and galloped over the open country, with hooded falcons perched on their wrists, long leather straps being fastened to the hawks' legs to prevent their escape. A bird sighted, the hoods were removed, the clutch on the jess relaxed, and up into the air soared the falcons high above their doomed prey, down upon which they swooped swiftly and surely, burying their cruel beaks and talons into the quivering flesh of the victims.

Sometimes the quarry would fly high and far, leading the pursuers a lively chase, and then was it that the sport became exciting. The Sieur de Clermont and his party were always accompanied by armed and

mounted attendants to guard against sudden attack, and he sternly forbade any of the party to separate from the rest, as times were still unsettled, crops were scanty, and ransoms, therefore, hard to raise.

One morning the sport was particularly good. The birds were easily started, the hawks in unusual good feather, and the quarry determined to escape their pursuers. The Lady Blanche was mounted on a horse as swift as any in the stables of Clermont, and when her falcon sighted a bird that flew far afield, ascended, descended, circled, and then took wing again, swiftly flying on and on, falcon and huntress were in full pursuit. Vainly the attendants attempted to keep up with her fleet and sure-footed steed, which far outspeeded theirs, and it was not long before she outdistanced them all. On sped horse and rider; on flew the falcon pursuing the prey like a relentless fate.

“*Hoyé! hoyé!*” cried the Lady Blanche at the top of her sweet voice, encouraging her hawk. She did not observe whither she went, how far she had ridden, or that none followed her, until she suddenly found herself surrounded by a body of horsemen whose commander was a great golden-haired, blue-eyed man, mounted on a splendid charger. Before she had taken in the situation a silken scarf was flung about her head and face. She was then gently lifted from her own horse onto the charger of the blond giant, who, encircling her slight form with his arm, gave rein

to his horse and galloped off, with the Lady Blanche a captive.

Being no weakling, she neither screamed nor fainted, but kept her wits about her to try and discover in what direction she was carried. But she could see nothing. The scarf was loosened about her mouth, but was still bound about her eyes, and all she knew of their movements was when they stopped to change horses. For hours, all day and all night, they galloped onward, not slackening the speed, fresh horses awaiting them at short stages. Lady Blanche knew not how long they travelled, for, faint with hunger and fatigue, she slept in the arms of the one who supported her. It was dawn when the horsemen stopped, and the shrill blast of a horn told her they had arrived at some château, and were probably at the end of their journey.

CHAPTER XIX.

SIR GRIFFITH AGAIN.

Sir Griffith had unexpectedly returned a day or two after the escape of Lady Ysobel and her deliverers. When he found that the old experienced seneschal had been outwitted by a girl, a lad, and a peasant, his disgust exceeded his anger. Sir Griffith cared nothing for the girl, whom he had never seen, and her ransom would have been but a drop in his already overflowing coffers, and still less did he care for the escape of Raoul and Iron Hand; but he felt his prestige at stake that any retainer of his should disapprove of one of the usages of the château and rebel against it. And he swore a mighty oath that a slip of a girl, a varlet, and a churl should not get the best of him, and that ere many suns had set all three should be back within the castle walls.

The next morning after his return he started in pursuit of the fugitives. He had little difficulty in finding the route and manner of their flight, though their precautions had baffled the old seneschal. But he did not reach Tours until two days after the Lady Ysobel

was safe under her father's protection, carefully guarded within a fortified castle, that was well victualled, and could be taken only by a considerable army well equipped with stone-throwing machines, derricks, battering-rams, and sapping miners.

But Sir Griffith was not easily dismayed, and he abided his opportunity, which he felt sure would come. He reconnoitred about the château and learned the habits of its lord, particularly in regard to his love for hunting with hawks in company with the ladies of his household. It pleased Sir Griffith to capture only what he considered his legitimate booty, the Lady Ysobel, so he loitered about the outskirts of the forest, and when the Lady Blanche's falcon led her so pretty a chase over hill and dale, he was at hand to seize her and to stifle her screams ere they could be heard by her escort.

He did not observe that his captive was a full-grown young woman, though he had been told that the only survivor of the wreck was but a mere girl.

The feelings of the Lady Blanche were not altogether unpleasant, for she took it for granted that her abductor was her discarded suitor; and it pleased her bold spirit to feel that, though she had given up her broad demesne to her would-be lord, it was herself he wanted as well, and she at once decided, like her English sister, Beatrice, that "anything less than a man was not for her," and that to be a man he must

not be only brave in war, but determined in his wooing.

Blindfolded, she was lifted from the horse, carried up the stairs, and deposited in an upper chamber. The scarf being removed from her eyes, she glanced about her, and was dazzled by the unexpected splendor of the apartment.

"In verity," she murmured, "Sir Guy had no need of another castle, for the Château de Charleroi could but ill compare in furnishings, at least, with this," and her eyes wandered from the rich crimson hangings that covered the walls to the silken-covered couch, the Persian mats upon the floor, the lamps of various shapes that hung from the ceiling by silver chains—a state of luxury for which she was entirely unprepared.

Food was soon brought her by a waiting-woman, and, after eating, she took off her hunting dress and lay down on the silken-covered bed and slept till evening. She was awakened by a woman entering her chamber bearing in her arms garments made of rich Eastern stuffs.

"My lord knowing that my lady's departure from home was unexpected, and that my lady is ill prepared for a visit, has sent this apparel lest she may wish to change her riding dress."

Pride was the dominant trait in Sir Griffith's character, and he wished to dazzle the maid by the costli-

ness of his possessions, that she might know that the ransom was a matter of little account to him. So he sent also a casket of priceless jewels, which he begged her to wear to show him that he had not incurred her displeasure by the summary proceedings that her own conduct had forced him to take.

The Lady Blanche, still thinking her abductor to be her disdained suitor, resolved to accede to his request, and arrayed herself in the costly robes and gems, and when she inspected herself in the metal mirror held in front of her by her waiting-woman, she was spell-bound by the result. She beheld a radiant creature of marvellous beauty, so striking was the effect of the rich colors of her robe and the flashing gems in her hair, on her round white throat and arms. The raven darkness of hair and eyes, the pink and white of face and throat, the pearly whiteness of her teeth, were accentuated by her elegant apparel, and she made a picture in her glowing youth and beauty to delight the eye of man.

There was a knock at the door, and word came from Sir Griffith that he was awaiting his fair guest in the supper-room. Lady Blanche was conducted to an apartment as luxuriously furnished as her own. In the centre was a table spread with sparkling glass and platters of silver and gold, and a repast that was worthy a royal guest, and at the head of the table stood a man clad in black velvet, who, in his great

blond beauty, seemed like the fabled sun-god of the north.

Lady Blanche stood still and wondered, for this was not the man she had expected to see, and the eyes that first met his so fearlessly now drooped, and in her heart of hearts she confessed that here was indeed a man.

Sir Griffith was as astonished as his fair guest, for he had heard naught of the maid's marvellous beauty; and for the first time in his life his heart quaked, and his tongue faltered as he bade her welcome; for how could he now hope to win the favor of the glorious creature he had run off with so cavalierly?

CHAPTER XX.

THE PURSUIT; BESIEGING OF CHÂTEAU D'ESTICOURT.

The Sieur de Clermont visited his wrath upon the whole party when he found that his niece had disappeared. He would not receive as any excuse the fact that Lady Blanche rode a faster horse than any save the lord himself. The special attendant whose duty it was to keep his lady in sight when hunting, was put in chains; while the whole household, irrespective of age, sex, or condition, felt the weight of his displeasure.

No trace of the missing girl could be discovered. A search party, who had been sent out to scour the country, returned with no further knowledge than that a struggle had evidently taken place a few miles from the castle, where the grass was found trampled down as if by a body of horse; the hoof-prints had been followed to the highway, where all trace had been lost in the thick dust of the unworked road. The peasants said that a body of horse had been in the neighborhood for several days, but had now disappeared, whither they had not noticed.

Like his niece, the Sieur de Clermont believed the

abductor to be Sir Guy de Nesle, and his anxiety was great, lest he take unfair advantage of his captive; so he prepared for a journey to their overlord to lay the matter before him. Just as he was about to start, however, the fourth day after the abduction of the Lady Blanche, a horseman appeared before the castle gate and demanded audience with the Sieur de Clermont.

On being admitted to the presence of the castle's lord, he presented him with a small packet. When the Sieur de Clermont opened the packet a paper was revealed on which a few lines were written in a clerkly hand—the chaplain's probably. The Sieur de Clermont was no more skilled in the clerkly art than his fellow nobles, so he had Père Louis called to decipher the script. Writing was not considered a knightly accomplishment in those days, and nobles retained clerks in their employ to perform such service.

Père Louis soon answered the summons; and in the pompous tone and manner of one performing a noteworthy action, read the following words:

“Griffith, Sieur d'Esticourt, always reclaims his own. If the Sieur de Clermont would regain the fair guest of Esticourt, let him seek her prepared to ransom her at a thousand crowns.” (A large sum in those days.)

The Sieur de Clermont gave orders for the enter-

tainment of the messenger, and when he had eaten and drunk his fill, a message to the lord of Esticourt was handed him, together with a piece of gold, as it was the custom to reward a messenger, be he herald of peace or of war. The message ran as follows:

“Geoffrey, Sieur de Clermont, also reclaims his own. He will give himself the pleasure of obeying the summons of Sir Griffith, self-styled Sieur d'Esticourt, but with a thousand men at his back, instead of a thousand crowns in his pouch.”

The Sieur de Clermont appealed to his lord for aid to rescue his captured niece, and was promised a small troop of horse and a body of archers, as the obligation of lord and vassal was still considered mutual.

Not many days elapsed ere Sir Griffith found himself besieged in his castle by a considerable force, well supplied with scaling ladders, battering-rams, and stone-throwing machines.

But the Château d'Esticourt was almost impregnable, besides being well garrisoned, and when the Sieur de Clermont sent Sir Griffith an imperative summons to restore his niece, that gentleman laconically replied:

“Come and get her.”

Then the Sieur de Clermont settled down in earnest to the task of reducing the castle. The balistas (stone-throwing machines) were put into position and

directed against the walls, but the missiles made no impression upon them, and fell harmlessly on the heavy roof of the château. The besieged also had balistas, and placing them on the roof of the donjon and on the broad walls, had the advantage of the enemy, for they could aim with deadly effect. Then the besiegers crossed the moat on a kind of float, and brought their scaling ladders into use. But as the men swarmed up the walls a shower of stones and burning pitch fell upon them, the archers shooting at them from the loopholes that pierced the walls.

Then the sappers were set to work to undermine the walls, but, like the house in the Bible, "it was builded upon a rock," and the floods and winds could not harm it, neither could man undermine it.

When Raoul fled from the Château d'Esticourt the seneschal was daily expecting the arrival of Sir Griffith, who would attend himself to the restocking of the castle with provisions. Raoul shrewdly reasoned that as the lord had been home but a few days, and during that time his thoughts had been probably engrossed in regaining his escaped prisoner, he had not fully re-victualled the castle. It required a great deal of food to feed so many mouths; all supply from outside was stopped by the besieging force, and, no doubt, a goodly amount of fish and grain would be very welcome. They were simply consuming time and sacrificing life in employing force; he would see what

stratagem would do. So he sought an interview with the Sieur de Clermont, from which he departed with a bag of gold. Stealing away without even the knowledge of Iron Hand, he disguised himself as a Breton fisherman, and engaging a fishing-boat and two men at the little village at the foot of the hill, he rowed off to the nearest town, where he secured a boat-load of provisions.

At daybreak the next morning the watchers in the château were much astonished to find that the enemy had raised the siege, having withdrawn silently and expeditiously under cover of night. It was still early morning when a shout was heard from below on the beach, which proved to come from some fisher-folk, who said they had provisions to sell. This was welcome news, and they were at once bidden to come up and around to the postern gate, where they would receive a good price for their wares.

But the fishermen demurred, fearing, they said, that the enemy would seize their goods and not pay them. But they were told that the enemy had retreated and the way was clear. So the peasants followed directions, and several men toiled up the steep ascent, each with a large, heavy sack upon his back. They were admitted at the postern gate, and bidden deposit their wares in the storeroom. They then received their pay and departed as they came, the postern gate being locked after them.

But all who entered had not departed, for one of the bags contained Raoul. When the porter left the room after carefully counting the bags, Raoul cut open the heavy sack with a knife provided for that purpose.

The great oaken door was securely fastened from without, and Raoul's escape depended on some one's coming to get provisions. Toward evening the steward came with one of the scullions for a fresh supply. The scullion carried a torch, which Raoul, before he had time to be seen, knocked from his hand. While the scullion was trying to dodge the blows rained upon him by the steward for his clumsiness and at the same time to pick up the spluttering torch, Raoul slipped by them in the shadow, ran quickly across the dark passage into the courtyard, and, darting across, entered one of the stables, where he remained in hiding until midnight.

Then, well knowing where the concierge slept, and this time having no scruples in taking the keys from him, he took from him the key and opened the postern gate.

On the other side of the moat was a company of lances, standing motionless, like so many trees on a windless night. At a word from Raoul a long plank was shot across the moat, and one by one the company silently crossed with muffled steps until they were within the courtyard. But they had not proceeded

far before the torch of the sentinel flashed in their faces.

“Betrayed! betrayed!” he cried, and almost instantly all was confusion and tumult. Men, still heavy with sleep, seemed to spring up from everywhere. Though taken by surprise, at a disadvantage because unarmed, the men of Esticourt were valiant fighters, and were preparing to make the intruders pay dearly for their temerity, when there came an order to lay down arms; and the lord of the castle sent an invitation to the Sieur de Clermont and his gallant company to meet him in the audience-hall.

The Sieur de Clermont hesitated to ascend, fearing an ambuscade in the many dark passages of the castle. He knew that it was well garrisoned, and that once in an apartment, their exit could be cut off, and they would be at the mercy of the garrison, who could surround them and close in upon them with little difficulty. But should he not accede to the request of the lord of the castle, it would be impossible to rescue his niece without a fierce encounter, and he was inclined to take the risk and meet her abductor, who probably felt himself at a disadvantage and was anxious to treat for terms. Leaving some of his company in the courtyard and instructing them to follow at a certain time, the Sieur de Clermont with the remainder, including Raoul, who was no longer disguised as a peasant but as gallant a looking squire as one might

meet with in a day's ride, followed the usher to the large audience-room that opened into the chapel.

They were kept waiting some time; then were heard strains of music, of choir boys singing, and the doors of the chapel were flung open, revealing a well-lighted interior. Before the altar stood the chaplain in his costly robes of office, and in front of him knelt a tall golden-haired, golden-bearded man clad in blue velvet embroidered with flashing gems, and beside him, all in white, was a kneeling slender figure.

The priest stood with his hands extended over their heads and with uplifted eyes. The benediction pronounced, the kneeling pair arose, and turning toward the astonished spectators, disclosed the proud smiling face of Sir Griffith and the blushing downcast countenance of the Lady Blanche.

The Lady Blanche looked regally beautiful in her flowing robes of white silk, with the adornment of magnificent jewels that flashed from her hair, throat, arms, and hands. Her eyes sparkled almost as brightly as the gems, and her lips curved with suppressed merriment. Sir Griffith led her by the hand up to her uncle, and said gravely: "This is my wife, the *châtelaine* of Esticourt, and she bids you forgive our former inhospitality and begs that we may be allowed to atone for it by receiving you as our honored guest. If you insist on robbing the *château* of its *châtelaine*, and its lord of his lady, it shall be as you

wish, but why not permit the Lady Blanche to decide for herself?"

With a charming gesture of mingled pride and shyness Lady Blanche gave her right hand to her newly made husband, and held out her left to her mystified uncle.

"Thank you for your great care, my dear uncle, and for your good wishes and intentions, but I prefer to remain with my lord and"—flushing rosily—"husband. Sir Griffith was about to open negotiations after you withdrew, but so long as you threatened he must have resisted."

"Blanche, my niece, the wife of a freebooter! Impossible!" exclaimed the Sieur de Clermont.

The hand of Sir Griffith involuntarily sought his sword hilt, but the Lady Blanche with a pleading look besought his patience, exclaiming:

"No, no, my uncle, not a freebooter; a free-lance, if you will, who has promised to yield allegiance to the King of France. Greet your new nephew with affection, I beseech of you, my good uncle, and remain with us to drink of the loving cup of amity and goodwill."

At a gesture from the bride the hangings over the door of the banqueting hall were drawn aside. Within was the festive board set for a hundred guests, gleaming with gold and silver platters and cups and ruby-colored wines. Instead of the fight they had expected

to participate in, they had come to partake of a marriage feast.

Sir Griffith freely forgave Raoul's theft of his prisoner, for it had been the means of his securing a charming bride.

CHAPTER XXI.

IRON HAND'S DOUGHTY DEED AND ITS REWARD.

In order to understand the following events it will be necessary to take a glance at what was happening elsewhere in France. We remember that King John of France had been taken prisoner by Edward of Wales, the Black Prince, at the battle of Poitiers, in 1356, and had been conveyed to England. Among the gentlemen who accompanied King John was the Compte de Rainault, the father of Raoul. While France was without a king the estates of the realm, called the States-General, had convened and proclaimed the dauphin Charles regent during his father's captivity. The dauphin Charles was a delicate youth of about twenty, small and of sickly appearance, and neither the States-General nor the Parliament of Paris felt any confidence in him.

The States-General saw an opportunity to inaugurate measures of reform, and the reforms they proposed, had they been accomplished, would have substituted a constitutional monarchy of limited power for an autocratic monarchy. Unfortunately they were not accomplished.

The provost of the merchants of Paris, Etienne Marcel, who was the principal officer of the capital, assumed control of the city, and caused the assassination of the dauphin's two chief counsellors, who had urged the young prince to resist all measures of reform designed for the relief of the people.

The King of Navarre, called Charles the Bad, considering that he had not been properly treated by the King of France, thought it an excellent time to retaliate while the king was a prisoner. The country was harassed by the English, and also torn by internal dissensions, so he marched upon the capital, cut off its supply of provisions, and secretly succored the peasants when they attacked castles and towns. Paris, therefore, was surrounded by the "Jacks" and Navarrese. To add to the complication of affairs, came the announcement that King John had agreed to terms for his ransom that would dismember the kingdom, despoiling it of its fairest provinces, and shut it off from the ocean, for the English demanded all the provinces lying between Calais and Bordeaux. Not only would the kingdom have been shut off from the ocean and the Straits of Dover, but also from the mouth of the Garonne, the Loire, and the Seine. In addition to this, King John agreed to pay four million golden crowns for his liberty.

The States-General of the North assembled, and deliberated on this monstrous piece of extortion, and

decided that the ransom should not be paid, and that King John must remain a prisoner until "God in His own good time should provide for his release."

Then Edward III., King of England, said he should no longer be so considerate of the French as to ask for only half of their territory, but that he would come in person and take the whole. Accordingly, he took the field, and accompanied by six thousand completely equipped men-at-arms, by his son, the Black Prince, his three other sons, and all his great barons, he set foot in France. Instead, however, of coming prepared to fight, they came prepared to occupy the country, even providing themselves with dogs for the chase, and leather boats to go fishing in during Lent, and with falcons, that none of them should lack diversion.

Not a battle of any importance was fought, but skirmishes between parties of English and French were constantly occurring. The English did not dare attack Paris because it was too well protected, but drew off toward the Loire, and there occurred a brief engagement that brought Iron Hand some golden crowns and the captaincy of a body of archers.

The Sieur de Clermont had put his castle in a state of defence, for he feared an attack of the English, as they were more intent at that time on plunder than glory. There was no acknowledged leader in France, so every lord looked out for himself; and the English profited accordingly.

While returning from Orleans, whence he had gone for some necessary supplies, the Sieur de Clermont and his company were set upon by a detachment of the English army, who lay in ambuscade awaiting his approach. Before the company suspected an ambush, they found themselves surrounded. There was some desperate fighting, for the English far outnumbered the French, who fought with the courage of despair. The Sieur de Clermont and Raoul were in the very thickest of the fray; Iron Hand was on the rear of the enemy, doing much effective work, his battle-axe doing active service with every swinging stroke.

Under cover of Iron Hand's battle-axe, the rest of the company were enabled to fight their way through the English men-at-arms and gallop off, all save the Sieur de Clermont and Raoul, the former having been unhorsed, and Raoul was trying to protect his body with his own. Both were bleeding profusely from many wounds, but both were fighting desperately, dealing powerful blows right and left. The enemy, however, were too much for them; the Sieur de Clermont had fallen, and could not rise, while Raoul was almost spent.

Suddenly there were heard the clashing and ringing of steel, and there was seen to be a commotion among the enemy, who turned from the assault on the Sieur de Clermont and Raoul to protect themselves on their rear. Before Raoul understood what it meant, he saw

the giant form of Iron Hand making its way toward them, and the flashing of his battle-axe as it cut a wide swath through the enemy's ranks. Ere the English had time to recover from their surprise and to close up behind him, Iron Hand had picked up the prostrate form of his lord and swung it upon his back. Bidding Raoul to follow closely, he hewed his way out, not stopping till he had clambered up a steep bank on the other side of the road, where the horses of the English could not follow, and through a thick piece of woods to an open place beyond, where he found the rest of the company awaiting further developments. Two of the squires gave up their horses to the wounded men, and then they made their way to the château, which fortunately was no great distance off, unmolested by the English, who in their innermost hearts were inclined to believe that Iron Hand was the Evil One, who had come to the rescue of the French.

This feat of Iron Hand's was long spoken of in the north of France, and the news of it reached the Duke of Orleans, overlord of the Sieur de Clermont, and he sent the brave peasant a purse of gold, and offered him the captaincy of a company of archers, for Iron Hand could draw a long and strong bow as well as wield effectually the battle-axe.

Iron Hand thankfully accepted the gold, but declined the captaincy, as he did not wish to be separated

from Raoul. But the Sieur de Clermont bade him take advantage of this opportunity to improve his fortunes. Raoul also insisted that he should serve under the duke, at least, for a time. So Iron Hand reluctantly consented; but after-events made the faithful attendant curse the ambition that caused him to desert his young friend, for to the end of his days he firmly believed that the misfortunes that befel Raoul would never have occurred had he been by to protect him. And thus it came to pass that the burly peasant was already captain of a body of archers, while Raoul was yet only *Dieu-donné*.

CHAPTER XXII.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

The north of France was in a high state of jubilation, for the terms of the French king's ransom had at length been adjusted, and King John had left Calais a free man, once more his own master. A great train of nobles with their squires had set out from Paris to meet their sovereign and to escort him in state to the capital.

Paris had been making extensive preparations to receive the king in a fitting manner. The narrow, crooked streets were gay with streamers of various colored cloths; the windows of the houses on the line of march were crowded with heads; everybody was talking to everybody else, while no one troubled himself to listen. Outside the city gates was drawn up an imposing array of Parisian soldiers, consisting of buckler-men, another of crossbowmen, and still another of *malletiers*, that is, men whose arms were maces or mallets. In addition to the throng of citizens, were thousands of the scholars of the University of Paris with their gaunt faces. Learning must have been acquired under difficulties in those days, for the

students were pale and haggard-looking, their hair was unkempt, their clothes were in rags, while they carried wooden bowls in which to receive the contributions of the charitably minded. Just within the gates of the city were the magistrates and members of Parliament in their crimson robes trimmed with fur.

Presently the blare of trumpets was heard, followed by the clatter of iron-shod hoofs; soon after appeared the heralds announcing his majesty's approach.

It was a magnificent sight, this procession of mail-clad horsemen wearing over their steel armor richly embroidered coats of cloth of gold, or of other costly stuffs, their steeds as gayly caparisoned as themselves, and the waving banners, fluttering pennons, and gay streamers that floated out on the wind.

There are only a few of the persons composing this goodly cavalcade of whom we will take particular notice.

King John was a figure that would have passed nowhere without remark, even without his kingly robes, on account of his handsome presence and powerful physique. He bowed to the right and left, smiling affably in response to the acclamations of his delighted subjects. He was mounted on a white charger splendidly caparisoned in purple velvet embroidered with gold thread. Over his own suit of light mail he wore a flowing robe of violet-colored velvet covered with golden fleurs-de-lis. By his side rode the dauphin,

Prince Charles, who had acted as regent during his father's absence. He was a pale, sickly-looking youth, and was regarded with indifference mingled with contempt by the people on account of his lack of knightly accomplishments. Yet this same prince, who never donned his armor to enter the battlefield, succeeded in winning back from the English nearly all that they had wrested from the French during his father's reign; and though he directed the campaigns from the seclusion of his cabinet, gave the doughty and brilliant Edward III., King of England, according to the English monarch's own statement, more trouble than both his grandfather and father together, in spite of their martial renown.

At the left of the king rode a young man of dazzling beauty. The long golden hair fell down over his shoulders in curling masses, the blue eyes shone brightly, and the cheeks and chin were as smooth as a girl's, despite the efforts of wind and sun to bronze them. This gentleman was Almeric de Raguenel, magnificently appareled, and seemingly in high favor with his majesty, who ever and anon would turn and address some word to him.

Later, in the train of the Duke of Orleans, came the Sieur de Clermont dressed in black, and followed by Raoul, who carried the lance, shield, and helmet of his lord. No one would have believed him to be a youth of nearly eighteen, for he looked like a man

grown: he was tall of stature and broad of shoulder, while a slight mustache covered his upper lip and a curly beard concealed his chin. He, too, was a handsome youth: the dark-blue eyes glowed with the fire of early manhood, even though the cheek retained the roundness of boyhood. His skin was clear and ruddy, his bearing frank and fearless, and the strength shown in the lines of the mouth and the firmness of the chin contradicted the youthfulness of the rounded cheek.

The procession stopped in front of the Louvre, that great prison fortress that was the royal residence as well as the place where state prisoners were confined.

All the participants in that immense procession found lodging and entertainment in the Louvre. A great banquet was given that afternoon in the state apartment in honor of the king's return, and all who were entitled to sit in the presence of the king were given a place at the board.

To Almeric de Raguenel was accorded the honor of attending the king, who, with Queen Blanche and the dauphin Charles, sat at a table on a dais at the end of the apartment.

Raoul was standing behind the chair of his lord, and he was much surprised to see his old enemy raised to so high a position. It was the first he knew that he was in the suite of King John, and he marvelled greatly how he came to be in Paris instead of in Brittany with Sir Griffith.

They did not meet till the next day, when they chanced upon each other in the tennis court. As Almeric saw Raoul he gave a start of surprise, then turned his head aside and remarked to his companion in a voice loud enough for all around him to hear:

“Is it permitted that varlets mingle with the gentlemen of the king’s suite?”

“I see no varlet here,” answered his companion.

“Because a varlet presumes to dress like a gentleman that does not make a gentleman of him. There is a fellow,” and he indicated Raoul with a contemptuous wave of the hand, “who cannot tell his own father’s name, or perhaps he is so ashamed of it that he finds it convenient to forget it.”

Raoul heard Almeric’s insulting words, as Almeric had intended he should. He placed himself squarely in Almeric’s path and blocked his farther progress. Almeric put his hand to his sword, and said insolently:

“Step aside instantly, *coquin*, or I’ll run my sword through thy miserable body.”

Raoul made no motion to stand aside. He had no sword—that was a privilege of gentle blood—but he had two natural weapons that proved as effective as Almeric’s sword, and these were two powerful hands backed by two strong arms.

“I may not know my father’s name,” said Raoul, “but I know enough to keep my hands off of other people’s property. I am no thief as thou art.”

“*Mort de ma vie!* I’ll stick that lie in thy throat!” and Almeric made a swift lunge with his sword at Raoul. But Raoul was quick of eye and hand, and in a trice he seized Almeric’s arm and twisted it so suddenly and violently that he dropped the weapon with an involuntary cry of pain.

“Thou shalt suffer for this,” Almeric shrieked in furious rage. “I’ll have thee put into the stocks.”

“I’ll meet thee any day lance to lance, or hand to hand, and prove my words.”

“*Ventre gris!* dost think I’ll meet in combat a peasant, a son of a peasant, a serf, who should not be permitted to speak to a gentleman without permission? I shall ask his majesty if it be his will that thy betters be polluted by thy company. In whose service art thou, *cochon?*”

By this time a crowd of courtiers surrounded the two angry youths. Raoul, though three or four years younger than Almeric, seemed, if anything, the elder of the two. The lookers-on wanted some sport. They did not believe Raoul to be of plebeian blood—he showed too much the bearing and breeding of an aristocrat—and they were in hopes a combat *à la mort* would be the next thing proposed. The two would have been well matched; for Almeric, though slighter than Raoul, was lithe and sinewy, and had the advantage of three years in training to develop his strength, and dexterity in the use of arms.

Almeric was no coward; he was as ready for a fight as any man, but it must be with one who was of gentle blood, or with one who at least had won his spurs. He had made Raoul's acquaintance under circumstances that made it improbable he was a gentleman's son, and it is not at all surprising that he should have regarded the boy as an upstart, one who needed to be kept in his place.

"*Viens!* throw him thy gauntlet," exclaimed one of the bystanders.

"*Mordieu*, but no! Am I a churl to break a lance with a peasant; a thief who runs away with his lord's prisoner; a liar who pretends to be what he is not?"

The above words had hardly been uttered when Almeric found himself sprawling on his back in the midst of the crowd of court attendants with Raoul standing over him, his eyes blazing with wrath, and every muscle quivering with passion.

Springing to his feet, Almeric put his hand to his scabbard, to find it empty! When he remembered how Raoul had made him drop his sword, he gritted his teeth and looked about for something to use as a weapon. Finding nothing, he pushed past Raoul and made his way to his majesty's cabinet, and begged an audience.

Almeric was a great favorite with King John, who admired above all things gallantry and daring, and the Breton youth was conspicuous for both. King

John had first seen him while he was staying at Calais, whither Almeric had repaired with some knights belonging to the Montfort party, who went thither to consult with King Edward. After Sir Griffith's marriage he had been content for a time to remain in his Brittany castle with his beautiful bride, but Almeric had soon wearied of inaction and had asked permission to offer his services to the Count of Montfort, who was trying to expel Charles of Blois from Brittany. The Count of Montfort had made allies of the English, and had visited the English sovereign while he was at Calais. King John was staying in the town at the same time, awaiting the final arrangement of the terms of his ransom, and he had been greatly attracted to the young Breton on account of his gallant bearing. He showed his preference so plainly that Almeric felt his fortunes to be made when the French king proposed to take him in his service. He quickly accepted the offer, and had steadily advanced in the king's good graces. He had entered Paris in the royal suite, and was promoted to a position of honor in his majesty's personal service. So when he begged the privilege of an audience, it was not denied him; and the king readily promised that he should be no longer annoyed by the insolence of the young upstart in the suite of the Sieur de Clermont.

CHAPTER XXIII.

RAOUL'S AWAKENING.

In the afternoon of the same day that Raoul had encountered Almeric in the tennis court, he was summoned to attend the Sieur de Clermont.

“ My son,” said that gentleman, “ what is it that thou hast been doing to his majesty’s gentleman that he should be angry with thee? ”

“ It must be, my lord, because I met Almeric de Ragueneil in the tennis court this morning and knocked him down on account of his insulting words in regard to me,” answered Raoul.

“ But, my son, it is necessary to observe the difference of rank between him and thee. He is heir to a large domain in Brittany; thou art but a poor unknown youth without land or heirship.”

“ My lord, am I then to submit to contumely because I have the misfortune not to know my father’s name? Am I not a gentleman born? Is not my blood as good as his? Are not my hands as strong? Can I not make as valiant a warrior, for have I not courage, strength, and skill? ” asked Raoul hotly, with

all a youth's intolerance of established custom when it conflicts with his happiness.

"Thou hast all these, Raoul; but what more canst thou offer thy king in the way of service than thy own skill and strength like any other man-at-arms who is to be had for gold? Canst thou bring other armed men to the king's aid when he has need of them? Messire de Raguene is heir to a fief that gives his lord forty men-at-arms in time of war. 'Tis a pity thou shouldst have quarrelled with one so much superior to thee in rank, for his majesty has sent to my lord Duke of Orleans to inquire concerning thee. My lord duke summoned me to attend him, and he bade me tell him all I knew concerning thee. I answered according to my knowledge of what thou hast told me, and spoke of what I myself knew of thee, and told all in thy praise that I could. My lord duke listened in silence, then requested that I keep thee from mingling with the gentlemen of the court, saying that thou hadst basely insulted a gentleman of his majesty's suite whose rank prevented him from avenging the insult personally. His majesty was of the humor to have thee publicly punished for thy contumacious conduct, but I pleaded with him so strongly that he relented on condition that thou shouldst no longer mingle in company of those above thee in rank."

The hot blood flooded Raoul's cheeks and brow, yet how impotent was he in his wrath! He answered

not a word, but withdrew to the apartment where he slept, and threw himself down in the corner appropriated to his use, and was seen no more that day. His brain was throbbing and whirling in a chaos of thought. He tried to think coherently, but his thoughts whirled so quickly and unceasingly through his brain that he wondered if he had not lost his wits and become demented. Hours passed; the other attendants came noisily into the room, and made ready for the night with much talk and laughter, but none noticed the youth in the corner, who seemed to be already sleeping. After all was quiet again, he suddenly felt a sharp, cutting pain in his head; flashes of light played before his eyes; there came a roaring of confused sounds in his ears; his head seemed to fill and burst; then he knew nothing more till he found the sun shining in his eyes through a narrow open casement. He looked about him; the room was empty; he must have lain unconscious for hours unnoticed. He arose, but felt strangely weak and giddy. He could not remember where he was. In his state of excitement and resultant insensibility some change had taken place, for when he returned to consciousness his memory returned also.

At first he thought himself in Château de Rainault, but in a few moments the remembrance of the terrible night that had bereft him of mother, home, and memory filled his heart with sorrow. By degrees all the

events that had transpired since, passed before his mental vision. For a short time his grief at the horrible fate of his mother was as poignant as on the fateful night of the tragedy; but by and by other thoughts crowded upon him, and the humiliation he had been made to suffer the previous day again made his proud spirit chafe and smart.

Then, after making a careful toilet, he went below to the offices to see if he could not get some food to overcome that strange feeling of weakness which seemed to deprive his limbs of the power of motion.

He found the corridors of the palace well-nigh deserted, and when he asked one of the guards if he knew where his lord, the Sieur de Clermont, might be found, he was told that their majesties, the king and queen, his highness the dauphin, and all of the nobles with their attendants, had gone to witness the great tourney in the market-place.

Raoul first obtained some food from one of the domestic serviteurs, then went to the stable where his lord's horses were housed, saddled his own genet, and rode to the market-place.

The streets about the market-place were filled with men, women, and children, who could not find even standing room in the square where the encounters were taking place. They made way for him, however, for from his dress and demeanor they took him to be one of the noblesse, so he did not have much difficulty

in reaching a spot from which he could obtain a fair view of what was going on in the lists.

It was a scene of great splendor. A platform had been erected on one side of the square, and this was covered with tapestry and made bright with different colored banners. On the platform were seated magnificently attired lords and ladies in raiment of every hue and flashing with gems. At the head of the arena was a covered stand, within which were seated King John, Queen Blanche, the dauphin Charles, and a few of the higher noblesse, while the ladies and gentlemen in waiting stood behind their majesties' chairs.

Amid the blare of trumpets two contestants were seen riding to their places within the lists. They were both mounted on spirited chargers, which, like the riders, were covered with linked mail. Over the suit of mail the combatants wore a coat of silk, embroidered with their respective device, which also appeared on shield and helmet. One of the riders' coats was blue; the other, crimson.

Their lances were delivered to them, the signal given, and then each put spurs to his horse, and they met in full career. Each kept his seat, though the one in blue, who seemed to be of slighter physique than his adversary, was almost unhorsed.

They rode back to their places; again the signal sounded, and again they rode at each other, this time meeting with terrific shock. Both kept their seats as

before, but both of the tough ash spears were shivered to splinters. As they rode back to their places amid the plaudits of the lookers-on, new lances were handed them, and at the proper moment they rushed to the meeting. This time, by a skilful manœuvre, the rider in blue succeeded in evading the blow aimed at him by his adversary, at the same time hurling his spear with such force as to pierce his mail on the left shoulder. There was a blood-stain on the lance as it was withdrawn, and the man in blue offered to cease the combat, but his adversary scorned to stop because of a scratch.

Again and again they charged, but they were so evenly matched that one could not seem to gain an advantage over the other. The crimson rider was stouter of build and had a more powerful physique, but the rider in blue was the more agile.

At length the crimson rider, seemingly determined to end the combat, charged full at his adversary with such force as almost to unseat them both, and broke his spear on the shield of the rider in blue. Disdaining the advantage given him by this accident, the rider in blue threw down his spear, but set his horse against the other's steed with such suddenness and force as to throw rider and horse.

This manœuvre was executed so quickly and so skilfully that it brought out a deafening roar of applause. The successful combatant raised his visor,

and rode around the ring, bowing low before the dais where sat royalty. His face was turned toward Raoul, who recognized the handsome countenance of Almeric de Raguenel, his eyes flashing with triumph and his lips curved in a smile of gratified pride.

Then came another blare of trumpets, followed by the ringing tones of a herald, who asked, so that all the mighty crowd might hear:

“ Is there any among you gallant gentlemen who, for love of his lady, is willing to try some feat of arms? If there be any such among you, here is a valiant gentleman, Messire de Raguenel, quite ready to tilt three rounds with the lance, also give three blows with the battle-axe, and three strokes with the dagger. Now look you, gentlemen, if there be any among you in love! ”

How Raoul’s heart came near bursting with desire to accept this challenge! How he would have gloried in laying that haughty head low in the dust! But they deemed him basely born, and denied to him the condition of gentleman. Should he try to ride into the arena, he would be hurried off to prison instead.

One knight after another rode into the lists to tilt with Messire de Raguenel, but whatever might have been the reason, whether his exultation strengthened his arm and quickened his eye, or whatever it may have been, he came out victor from every contest. Old knights and experienced warriors declared they

had never seen his like in one so young. King John was half inclined to try a bout with him, but desisted because he was already past forty-five, and even should he prove the better man it would be secretly believed that Almeric had been too good a courtier to vanquish his sovereign.

When no other knight appeared to contest the field, King John called the victor to him, and in the presence of that vast throng, now almost in a *furore* of delirium in their delight at the success of the young stranger, bade him kneel before him, and then and there bestowed upon him the honor of knighthood.

But a more imposing ceremony was arranged for later in the day. It was just before the banquet that was to be served at five o'clock in the great banqueting hall. King John sat upon a velvet-covered throne in the state audience chamber; on his head was a jewelled crown that radiated flashes of light with every movement; in his hand was a golden sceptre, also studded with gems. About him were grouped the greatest of the nobles present, while the main body of the audience chamber was filled with a handsomely attired crowd of gentlemen. About the door were assembled the attendants, and among these Raoul was obliged to take his place, much to his mortification. He had thus far found no opportunity to confer with the Sieur de Clermont, and to tell him of his recovered memory, to inform him of the fact that he was heir to the

county of Rainault, one of the most considerable fiefs in the north of France, and that he was the only son of the Count of Rainault, once a favorite knight of King John's suite.

He longed to ask news of his father, whom he had not seen since the battle of Poitiers, the nineteenth of September, 1356, four years before. He was burning with impatience to return to his home, and to see if any of the old serviteurs had been spared. He knew nothing of the fate of the retainers of the house of Rainault.

Presently there came the cry of the herald to "Make way!" and then there appeared the officers of the king's household in their robes of office, followed by Almeric de Raguene, a robe of white silk covering his tunic of light blue velvet, and embroidered over with silver tigers, the device of his house. He was succeeded by four youths who also wore the device of the house of Raguene, being attendants of the newly made knight.

The officers of state led the way to the foot of the throne, the rest following. There, two of Almeric's retainers removed from his feet his golden spurs, while another took his sword. Then he knelt before the king, and one of the state officers said to him:

"Sir, as Count of Rainault you acknowledge yourself to be vassal of my lord the king, and you promise to bear true faith and allegiance to him?"

The king held out his two hands to take those of Almeric between them while he repeated the oath of fealty. Almeric put his hands together, palm to palm, and placed them within the king's, waiting to repeat the oath as it was given him; but before the officer had said the first word, there was seen a disturbance in the farther end of the room, and a clear, ringing voice rang throughout the great hall:

“One moment, gentlemen! If my father be indeed dead, behold in me the heir of Rainault! I am Raoul, son of my late lord, the Count of Rainault.”

The room was in an uproar at once. Two of the king's officers sprang forward to order his arrest; they bade him be silent. But he would not be silent.

The king looked about him in anger at the interruption. “Who is it that dares create so unseemly a disturbance in my royal presence?”

“Sire, it is some one who claims to be heir of the late lord of Rainault.”

“Bring him hither that I may see him,” commanded the king.

Raoul was conducted to the king between two men-at-arms.

“He is here, your majesty.”

Meanwhile Almeric had risen to his feet, for the king had withdrawn his hands and appeared to have forgotten him. He looked at Raoul, and exclaimed in a loud voice:

"He is an impostor! He is naught but a churl once in the service of my former lord, Sir Griffith, the Sieur d'Esticourt!"

"I am Raoul, the son of the Count of Rainault," repeated Raoul, looking at the king with beseeching glance.

"He is but a pretender," reiterated Almeric; "and here is my gage to any one who would gainsay me!"

Then Raoul wrenched himself free from his keepers, and, stooping, picked up the gauntlet Almeric had thrown down.

"Never shall my lips touch wine till I have proved thee an arrant liar!" he exclaimed.

"Apprehend the malcontent, and convey him hence!" thundered the king.

Raoul was immediately seized by the two men-at-arms and taken to that part of the Louvre that was then used as a place of confinement for state criminals. He was put into a cell into which the light of day never penetrated, as it was underground.

King John watched his departure in silence. After he had disappeared from his sight, he said:

"That fellow is an impostor, for the son of my dear lord, the late Count of Rainault, would be but a boy, while this churl is a man grown. Let us proceed to the banquet. Another and more auspicious day will we invest Messire de Raguenel with the county of Rainault."

CHAPTER XXIV.

RAOUL'S TRIAL.

When Raoul had been thrust into his dark dungeon, he had just time to catch a glimpse of a heap of straw that lay in one corner of the cell, before the guard withdrew with his light and shut the door. He threw himself down on the straw, face to the floor, and gave way to a paroxysm of despair. But he could not long remain inactive. He arose and began pacing the narrow limits of his cell, four strides one way, three the other. His whole being was in revolt at the outrage done him. Almeric de Raguenel seemed to be his evil genius; all his later trouble had come through him. If the knave had not stolen his horse Charlemagne, he could have followed Sir Griffith to Bordeaux, and perhaps by this time he would have been on the way to fortune instead of languishing in a prison cell. Here he paused. No; if he had indeed followed the Welsh knight to Bordeaux, he could not have restored the Lady Ysobel to her father's arms, neither would he have known the sweetness of her companionship.

He wondered what she would say, how she would feel when she came to know of his misfortune. She would believe him, he knew, and would make no doubt but that he was the heir of the county of Rai-nault if he said so.

At length his legs failed beneath him, and he again threw himself down on his bed of straw. How long he lay there he could only conjecture. It seemed to him as if a whole day and night passed before sleep came to his relief. When he awoke he forgot for the moment where he was, and he lay still waiting for dawn to appear. He was ravenously hungry, and when fully awake soon remembered where he was and why he was there. He wondered whether they were going to allow him slowly to starve to death. He tried to reconcile himself to his apparent doom, but his heart was heavy and sore. What had he done that fate should treat him so cruelly? Did any one ever have so sorry a life in so short a one? First, to have his father taken prisoner by the enemy who was devastating the country; then to have his dear mother so foully murdered; last, himself to be exiled from the home of his fathers, and to serve as a lackey, he, the son of one of the most redoubted knights of the time, and finally, after being insulted and humiliated, to be imprisoned when he had done harm or injury to no one.

Would the Lady Ysobel try to persuade her father

to beg the king's clemency when she was apprised of his fate? Would she really care? Then he remembered her goodness and sweet womanliness, and the many little acts of thoughtful kindness she had done him that bore witness of her good feeling for him, and his heart grew lighter and he began to hope.

Again the pangs of hunger made themselves energetically felt. His young, healthy appetite would be hard to subdue. He strained his hearing to find out if it were day or night by sounds of stirring without. But all was absolute stillness. He called again and again, but his voice seemed smothered by the darkness and the confined space of his cell, and he felt sure his cries did not penetrate the walls of his dungeon.

He began pacing the floor again, and stumbled over something. He stooped to feel what it was, and found he had overturned a stone jug of water that had not been there before he slept. He groped in the darkness on the stone floor and found a loaf of bread that had been wet by the water that had poured out of the jug when he upset it. There was but a few drops left in the jug, scarcely enough to moisten his lips, but as his bread was soaked he managed to satisfy his hunger and thirst at the same time.

Again the time dragged wearily. Absolute darkness, absolute silence, absolute idleness! He felt as if he could not endure it, yet he knew he must. He watched and waited, hoping that his keeper would

appear with food and drink. But it seemed to him as if he might as well be buried alive.

Again he slept, and awoke with his throat parched by thirst. He felt about the floor to find if anything had been left him while he slept, but found nothing. In a little while he fell into a troubled slumber, and dreamed of cooling springs that would run from him as soon as he stooped to wet his lips with their sparkling waters. Sometimes he would succeed in getting a few drops, but they were like molten lead as they touched his throat. Again he awoke and sought for water in vain. It was a long time before he even dozed. He slept fitfully, but heavier than he thought, for when he awoke he threw out his hand and found the jug had been filled during his sleep and a loaf of bread placed at his side.

At length he came to the conclusion that food and drink were brought him every twenty-four hours, and he began reckoning the days by the number of times food was brought him. He tried to keep awake, for he longed to speak to some one, and to hear the sound of a human voice; but try as he would, he never saw when his food was placed beside him.

Fourteen times had it been delivered to him in this mysterious manner, when to his unutterable delight he heard the key grate in the lock of his cell, and he saw a streak of light as the door slowly opened. A man entered, and said gruffly and briefly:

“ Come! ”

“ Whither am I to go? Am I free? ” asked Raoul eagerly.

“ Pardie, but no. Thou hast been summoned to appear before the magistrates.”

Raoul begged to be allowed to make his toilet, but the keeper said he had no instructions to do aught but bring the prisoner before the judges, and he must come forth as he was.

As Raoul followed his guide out into the corridor, his eyes were blinded by the rays of the torch, and he was obliged to grope his way. After a while he grew a little accustomed to the light, and he brushed off the wisps of straw that clung to his garments, and pulled them out of his hair, and brushed down his dishevelled locks, but do as he would his appearance was not such as to attract a person who was fastidiously nice in regard to cleanliness.

The judges had met in the council-room in the Louvre. They were ranged at the farther end of the room on a raised platform, and looked sufficiently imposing in their furred crimson robes to overawe a less sensitive youth than Raoul. In front and below the magistrates were the clerks of the court, busily writing at a long table. The spectators were seated on benches on either side of the room. In his half-blinded state Raoul could distinguish no familiar face.

He was conducted up the apartment until he faced the judges. One of them began to interrogate him.

“What is thy name?”

“Raoul de Rainault, my lord, son of the late lord Count of Rainault.”

“When and how did my lord, the Count of Rainault, die?”

“I know not, my lord.”

“When didst thou last see him?”

“Before the battle of Poitiers, four years ago, when he was taken prisoner by the English.”

“Hast thou not heard from him since?”

“Once, my lord, when he sent a messenger home to procure his ransom.”

“Was it raised and sent to him?”

“No, my lord; before it was collected the peasants attacked the château, one of the serviteurs opened the secret gate to the wretches, and they surprised the castle and murdered my dear mother, while me they threw over the castle walls.”

“What became of the serviteurs?”

“I know not, my lord; for after falling on the ground I was made unconscious, and when I came to myself I had forgotten all that had happened before.”

“Thy statement is a strange one. What hast thou done since, and with whom hast thou lived?”

“I lived with some peasants in a cave the first winter, my lord; then I went with Sir Griffith to Brit-

tany, where I remained a year; after that I lived with my lord, the Sieur de Clermont."

"What witnesses canst thou bring to support thy word?"

"Iron Hand, a peasant of Orléannois; Sir Griffith, Sieur d'Esticourt; and the Sieur de Clermont, my lord."

"Hast thou no signet, jewel, or aught showing the device of thy house to corroborate thy statement?"

"Yes, my lord," and he detached a ring from a fine chain of gold he wore about his throat, and held it in his hand. It bore the device of a soaring eagle. The judge ordered that it be passed to him.

"Why didst thou wait until his majesty the king was about to bestow the seigneurie of Rainault upon Messire de Raguenel before asserting thy claim to it?"

"Because, my lord, I did not remember till the night before that I was the son of the Count of Rainault."

A derisive laugh sounded in Raoul's ears. Glancing about him, he encountered the mocking look of Almeric de Raguenel, who was regarding him with a contemptuous smile.

"Forsooth, he hath invented a pretty tale," he said to his neighbor.

"Hast thou not invented this story?" suspiciously questioned the judge, who plainly showed he thought

the prisoner was putting forth a claim for that to which he had not the smallest right.

"No; in very truth, my lord, I am the son of the late lord of Rainault, who is dead, but how he was killed I know not."

The judges consulted together. There was much shaking of heads and wagging of beards. No one believed a word of the story the youth had told; it was altogether too improbable. The only thing in the prisoner's favor was the possession of the signet ring, which he said had been given him by his father. But even that slight advantage was taken from him; for while the magistrates were talking together, Almeric spoke to one of the officers of the court, who in turn whispered something to the presiding judge, who consulted with his confrères, the result of it all being that the presiding judge invited Messire de Raguenel to make the statement to the court for which he had asked permission.

Almeric arose, bowed to the judges, and said respectfully:

"May it please my lords judges to examine this brooch and see if it does not bear the same device as does the ring exhibited as evidence by this pretender."

The brooch was passed up to the judges. They examined it carefully, compared it with the ring, and had considerable parley over it.

"Where didst thou get this brooch, my lord?" asked the presiding judge after a little time.

"From the same person who furnished this varlet with his ring, my lord," answered Almeric; "from an old *sorcière* in Brittany, who predicted all manner of good fortune for me, and who, no doubt, made up his tale for this churl, who has not wits enough to fabricate it for himself."

So saying, Almeric resumed his seat.

Again there was a whispered consultation among the judges. Presently the presiding judge addressed the prisoner:

"You have heard what this gentleman has said. Is it true you visited a sorceress in Brittany?"

"Yes, my lord judge; but it was to her that I gave——"

The judge had raised his hand to command silence.

"Answer only the questions asked of thee. About what didst thou consult her?"

"Concerning my past, my lord."

"Why shouldst thou ask regarding thy past; most of us want to know rather of our future?"

"Because I could remember nothing of what had happened to me, and I wanted to know."

The judges nodded their heads. It was very clear it was the *sorcière's* work. They did not know what to do with the case; they must have time to think

about it. One of the judges whispered to his chief, who once more addressed the prisoner:

“Wilt thou confess that thou hast acted under the spell of the enchantress, and that thy story is false? If thou wilt sign such a confession, thou wilt be released, though kept under strict surveillance.”

“But, my lord judge, I cannot confess a lie.”

“Think again. If thou persist in thy pretensions the prison doors shall once more shut out the light of day from thy eyes.”

“My lords judges,” cried Raoul desperately, appealing to the whole bench, “it is true what I say. Send for Iron Hand; he will tell you, my lords judges, of the attack on the château, and of my finding him the day after outside its walls. Send for the serviteurs of the Count of Rainault; they will remember me!”

“Where is this person thou callst Iron Hand to be found?”

“He is in the service of the Duke of Orleans, my lords.”

“We will summon him. In the meantime thou shalt be taken back to thy cell to think over what has been said to thee. It is well known that the Château de Rainault was attacked by the peasants during their uprising, an insurrection which, by the help of God, has at last been quelled. It is also known that madame, the wife of the late lord of Rainault, and monsieur, his son, as well as their attendants, were most

fouly slain, and that the count himself was lost in a violent storm that ravaged the coast for many days after he set sail from England for France. All these things are well known, and it were easy for any one to lay claim to be the son of the late lord. But that same son was then a lad of thirteen years, and would now be but a youth of scarce eighteen, while this man looks to be twenty-five. However, will we send for this same Iron Hand, and for any other person who may have known the son of the late Count of Rainault. In the meantime the prisoner shall have leisure to repent of his false allegations. Take him hence."

To Raoul's surprise, he was not taken back to the cell he had so recently left, but was conducted out into the open court, where he saw a mounted troop of men-at-arms who seemed to be awaiting him, for so soon as he appeared, a horse was brought forward; he was bidden to mount it, a cloak to which a hood was attached was handed him, then the men closed in about him, and he was conducted out of the city to a fortress prison some miles distant from the capital. On arriving before its gates the captain of the company demanded entrance *par du roi*, and delivered his prisoner to the governor of the fortress. After certain formalities Raoul was conducted to his cell, which, greatly to his relief, he found was not a dark dungeon, but was above ground, and had a narrow casement that admitted the sunlight. After

the door closed upon him, and he found himself alone, Raoul tried to reach the window, but the wall was thick, and the opening so narrow that he could not squeeze his body through it, being only a foot wide, while the walls were four feet thick.

Day after day passed in this weary confinement. The unlucky prisoner could now tell day from night, but he saw no human face, nor heard any human voice save his own; his food was pushed to him through a little window in the door of his cell, but he never saw the hand that put it there.

He had nothing to do all the long hours of the days and nights save to sleep and to think. How gladly would he have relinquished all claim to the heirship of Rainault if they would only give him his liberty! He was often tempted to swear to a lie, and to try to send word to the judges that he had been tempted by the Evil One through the Brittany sorceress, and that he wished to confess and be absolved from his sin. He had no doubt, that when the window in the door was again let down, if he would go to it and shout out his desire to see the judges they would be informed of his wish. But he could not bring himself to swear that he was not his own father's son.

But Raoul found strange friends in his prison cell, a companionship that saved him from going mad. One day, when he felt too much depressed to eat his

bread, he saw a little black head poke itself out of a crevice in the stone walls of his dungeon. There was a twinkling of two bright little eyes that cast quick glances to and fro. Then a body followed the head, and a rat scampered up on the bench where lay Raoul's bread, and began nibbling it. Raoul would not stir; he scarcely breathed lest he frighten away his visitor, who was regarding him with inquisitive eyes, taking a nibble at the crust between whiles. Every day after that would this little visitor appear. One day he brought a companion, and a few days later he was accompanied by his entire family. Raoul always saved some of his bread for his visitors, who soon learned to come when he gave a peculiar, shrill whistle. Sometimes he would whistle for their amusement, and they would sit still on the bench and listen to him with apparent appreciation of his effort to entertain them. He gave them all names, and by and by one of them would run up his leg and let him smooth its hairy little head.

The weeks went wearily by, cheered only by the visits of his little companions. Raoul had become hopeless of regaining his freedom; he believed himself to be forgotten by every one save Iron Hand, and where was he?

CHAPTER XXV.

A SURPRISE.

It was regarded as an ominous sign when an act of particular importance was interrupted by any untoward incident, so King John decided to postpone the ceremony of bestowing the fief of Rainault on Almeric de Raguenel until he was in actual possession of the holding, and to have him take the oath of fealty on the spot.

The rejoicings over the king's return were continued in Paris for a week longer. Then the day for Raoul's formal interrogation being appointed for the following week, it was thought best to await the decision of the judges before proceeding to Rainault; consequently, it was more than two weeks after the eventful day of the tourney before King John and his suite, including Almeric and the Sieur de Clermont, set out for Rainault.

The Sieur de Clermont had interceded with the king for Raoul, and had so far succeeded in obtaining the royal indulgence as to have the youth confined in a cell above ground into which shone the light of day. The Sieur de Clermont did not say that he be-

lieved Raoul to be the son of the Count of Rainault; he did not know whether to believe it or not, for it seemed incredible, as the boy had come to him from Brittany, and Rainault and Esticourt were distant from each other at least a four days' journey. But the breeding and bearing of the youth were not those of a varlet; his fine physique, his shapely hands and feet, his manly grace, in short, all his distinctive characteristics were of the aristocratic type rather than of the bourgeois. He would not have been surprised to find Raoul's story to be true, but would not give expression to his belief, but begged the king's clemency on the plea that the boy was either wrong in his head or was under the spell of the Brittany enchantress.

In the meantime Lady Ysobel was impatiently awaiting the return of her father. He had said to look for him again in a sennight, or at furthest in a fortnight, and three weeks had passed since their departure, bringing no hint of their return.

Day after day Ysobel would perch herself on the broad stone sill of the window, high up in the turret that overlooked the road to Paris. She told herself it was her father's company she missed so much, knowing all the while that it was Raoul's absence that had made such a void in her days, for though there were serviteurs in plenty to attend her and do her pleasure, it was Raoul who had ridden by her side when she went hawking; it was Raoul who was ever near to

guide her palfrey over difficult places; it was Raoul who sang to her and told her tales of chivalric adventure when the weather was stormy; it was Raoul, indeed, who ever bore in mind to serve her, protect her, and to give her pleasure.

Now her heart was not a little sore because of him; she thought he was enjoying the gayeties of the royal court while she was pining in solitude. She wondered if there were many demoiselles at court, and if Raoul did for their pleasure as he had done for hers. And all the time she was picturing Raoul in situations of the utmost felicity, he was eating out his heart in solitary confinement, yearning for a sight of her face or a sound of her voice.

And while Ysobel was impatiently awaiting her father's return, watching from her turret window the long white road that stretched away to Paris, her heart quickly beating with anticipation at every cloud of dust a chance traveller raised, the Sieur de Clermont was journeying toward Rainault in the suite of King John.

Almeric was a great favorite with all the company; for, feeling himself secure of the royal favor, having no rival near at hand to disturb his serenity, he was good-tempered, gay, lavish with his gold, and an excellent comrade in every respect, and one who also commanded admiration on account of his gallantry and his skill in feats of arms.

They did not reach Rainault without adventure, and the manner in which Almeric conducted himself during the episode increased the good opinion entertained of him by his companions.

The north of France was infested with brigands, for when a truce was proclaimed between France and England large bodies of men were thrown out of employment. These men would band together, and under the command of some reckless knight would ravage the country, living on what they could get by pillage. They would get possession of some fortified city, in which they would intrench themselves, and from which they would sally forth, from time to time, on depredating expeditions. No one could journey from Paris to Orleans or Chartres without an armed guard, that part of the country being particularly infested with Gascon and Breton freebooters.

The king's party consisted of about a dozen knights and their attendants, amounting in all to about fifty armed men, including the Sieur de Clermont and his retinue. They proceeded leisurely, intending to take two days to make the journey, a distance of sixty miles; for they were to sleep at one of the royal residences, a château about midway between Paris and Rainault. Almeric had ridden a little way in advance, for the hour was late, and he was desirous of his dinner. On arriving at a place where two roads intersected, he saw the print of horses' hoofs. So

badly was the road cut up he knew that a numerous body of horse had recently passed that way. He rode cautiously forward, hoping to find that they had ridden on past the château that was to be their stopping place for the night. It would be awkward enough to have them camp this side of the royal château, for were they freebooters they would have but little respect for the king, except as offering the chances of a richer booty than would a simple gentleman. To his discomfiture, Almeric found they had gone into camp on a level plain about a mile farther on, thus intercepting the king's progress. He rode on as near to the camp as he could without detection, and saw that the company consisted of at least two hundred men. Opposite to their camping place was a steep hill, at the foot of which wound the road, it being impossible to pass around the camp without a long *détour* which would take them miles out of the way. Almeric wanted his dinner, and he made up his mind that the royal party were to pass by that road and were not going to fall into the hands of any Navarrese or English freebooters, either.

He rode back and reported his discovery, at the same time suggesting to his majesty that they wait till it should grow darker, when the freebooters would, no doubt, have thrown off their armor and would be engaged either in eating or in preparing their dinner, and then for the king, with twenty of his attendants, to ride

on boldly past the camp, while Almeric and the other thirty would charge upon the camp, diverting their attention from his majesty and his escort.

“But, my dear lord,” said the king, “that were a dangerous undertaking for so few in number, if the enemy be as many as thou sayest. No doubt, we can surprise them and make our way past in safety.”

“But if your majesty should be taken prisoner, the ransom would be a large one,” remonstrated one of his officers.

“In truth, thou art right,” and King John heaved a deep sigh. “I know not how the amount still owing his majesty, the King of England, is to be paid.”

The other knights joined their entreaties to those of Almeric, and at length the king consented to do as was requested of him, saying if any of his loyal followers should be taken captive he would be responsible for his ransom.

They waited for the shadows to grow longer; then Almeric again rode forward to reconnoitre. He found that the freebooters were engaged in eating their dinner, having cast aside their arms; so he gave the signal agreed upon, and the king and his escort rode swiftly up the road. Just as they came abreast of the camp they were discovered. The command was given:

“*Aux armes! aux armes!*” But before the freebooters could seize their arms, Almeric and his com-

panions had charged down upon them with such celerity and shouted so lustily that the freebooters thought they had the whole king's army sweeping down upon them, for they knew they were on the royal domain. Across the plain rushed Almeric and his companions, striking out to right and left with their battle-axes. They had the enemy at a disadvantage, for they were crowded in upon one another, and some were without arms. Though the freebooters were two hundred and the royal party but thirty, the freebooters became completely demoralized. Their consternation was increased when the king, seeing how things were going, charged in upon them from another direction. They believed themselves to be completely hemmed in, and an utter rout ensued. Panic-stricken, they fled hither and thither, some leaping upon their horses, others running away on foot. The victorious party did not pursue them very far, for the freebooters had left behind a rich booty, the spoils of a recent raid upon a poorly fortified town.

Almeric and his companions remained to guard the treasure, while King John and the others of the party rode forward to the royal château. On reaching the castle the king ordered that a sufficient body of mounted men be sent back to bring the treasure to the château. All the members of the victorious party were large gainers by this exploit, but Almeric's share was the largest, for his majesty declared that it was owing

to his vigilance that they had not been surprised and perhaps captured.

The rest of the journey was made without adventure or mishaps. The high towers of Rainault Castle were already visible, when Almeric asked of one of the king's officers:

“Does suitable entertainment await the king in the castle?”

“*Mordieu, yes,*” answered the chamberlain. “If the château were not inhabited, serviteurs would have been sent in advance to prepare for his majesty's coming; but the governor of the castle has been apprised of the royal visit.”

“Is the château occupied?”

“Since more than three years. When the company that was despatched to the aid of madame la comtesse found that they had arrived too late to save the châtelaine and her son, they dispersed the Jacks, who were encamped about the walls of the château, after some pretty hard fighting, and then attempted to enter the castle. But the gate was closed, so they scaled the walls, and found a most revolting sight within. There had been a fire in the great hall, and the floor was strewn with the half-burned bodies of the inhabitants of the château as well as those of their assailants. The body of the lady of the castle was distinguished by her jewels, and her remains were interred in the chapel belonging to the château. The chamber was quickly

cleaned out, quicklime was thrown on the bodies that completely filled the ditch in front of the château, and so soon as it was possible to inhabit the place, Monseigneur le Dauphin sent a governor with a sufficient number of people to hold the castle until the Count of Rainault should return. But he now lies at the bottom of the sea, unless indeed his body has not been long eaten by the fishes, and thou art about to take possession of the rich county of Rainault," and the chamberlain sighed a little enviously, though he was a man of great possessions.

"Were the remains of the boy identified?" asked Almeric, ignoring the concluding remarks of his companion.

"I have never heard," answered the other indifferently. "Some of the bodies were burned to a crisp, so it was difficult to distinguish a Jack from a lord."

"What if Raoul's tale be indeed true?" mused Almeric. "It would be but ill fortune for me. *Mordieu*, he shall have no chance to prove it, if I can help it!"

As they reached the bottom of the hill that led up to the château, a train of attendants left the gate and ranged themselves along the road on either side, and saluted the king on bended knee as he passed between them. The governor of the château, awaiting his majesty just within the gate, held his stirrup while he dismounted, and then conducted him to the great

door that led up to the state apartment. As he arrived at the foot of the stairs, a tall, commanding figure was seen descending them, dressed in crimson and black. As the king glanced upward into his face, his majesty gave a cry of joy, and instead of permitting him to kneel and kiss his hand, threw his arms about his neck and embraced him warmly, saying all the while:

“ My dear lord, my dear lord, art thou indeed returned from the dead? ”

It was the Count of Rainault!

CHAPTER XXVI.

RAOUL'S MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE.

King John would take neither bite nor sup till he had heard the count's story of his escape from the watery grave which all had thought to be his fate. The count told his story briefly in answer to his majesty's many questions.

The vessel in which he had sailed from England some months before the final adjustment of the terms for King John's ransom, had been blown out of her course by the terrible storm that had broken out the day after they set sail. The captain lost his reckoning, they lost all sight of land, and neither passengers, crew, nor captain had any idea of their whereabouts. Provisions ran low, the high waves that swept the deck had disabled some of the sailors, and the crew was well-nigh exhausted by loss of sleep, insufficient nourishment, and anxiety. One night the vessel struck upon a rocky beach. Whether the watch was asleep or not was never known, for he, with all of the passengers and crew, save three, either became food for the fishes or were washed up dead upon the beach.

The count was one of the three survivors. He and

two of the sailors had seized a spar to which they succeeded in clinging until morning, when they found themselves within a few rods from shore. The waves still swept the beach and they had hard work to get beyond their reach. They made their way inland, and found they had been cast ashore on the Spanish side of the Pyrenees in the territory of the King of Navarre. The count feared to reveal his identity lest he should be detained until the governor of the place should learn the pleasure of King Charles concerning him, for there did not exist the friendliest relations between the kings of France and Navarre at that period; as the Navarrese king was a faithless friend and an uncertain ally, giving his support to whichever monarch offered him the greatest inducements.

The three sought the hospitality of a monastery. The count had some gold concealed about his person, and with this he purchased a pedlar's outfit, and joined a troop of Navarrese who had been in the service of Dom Pedro, King of Castile, and were returning to French Navarre at their sovereign's command. Under their protection he crossed the Pyrenees in safety, paying for his food with his wares. From French Navarre he journeyed northward, sometimes attaching himself to a merchant's train, sometimes travelling with a free company. He met with many adventures, and was frequently detained on account of the roads being made impassable by reason of freebooters

or heavy rains. At length, weary, footsore, and travel-worn, he reached the confines of his own domain, and thence was free to make his identity known. There he discarded his pedlar's pack, furnished himself with suitable apparel, was recognized by his people, and welcomed with great enthusiasm as one who had returned from the dead. Later he was told of the dire calamity that had befallen his family during his absence.

He could not realize his bereavement at first. The tale was almost incredible, for Rainault was a fortress castle designed to withstand all assaults short of an attack by an army provided with the most powerful besieging apparatus.

He finished his journey sorrowfully, no longer anticipating the joy of his loved ones at his unexpected return. He had reached the château but a few days before his majesty's visit, and on learning of his intention of honoring his house with a royal visit, had awaited him at home instead of going on to Paris to inform the king of his safe return.

It was not till after dinner, and they were seated around the board drinking spiced wine and eating sweet cakes and comfits, that King John told the Count of Rainault how near he had come to bestowing his seigneurie upon another, and that this other was Messire Almeric de Ragueneel.

“*Mordieu*, but this gallant gentleman would have

made a better lord than I, for now am I broken by grief and made desolate by misfortune. He may have it yet, as I do not feel my days to be long on this earth, and I have thought to spend my remaining years in a monastery, to pray for the repose of the souls of my dear lost ones, and in making my peace with God and the saints."

Then King John bethought himself of the pretensions of the varlet in the suite of the Sieur de Clermont to the seigneurie of Rainault, and he threw back his head and laughed loud and long, and told his dear lord how a base-born churl had dared proclaim himself his son, and how the pretender was repenting his temerity within four stone walls.

But instead of laughing with the king, the count questioned his majesty with eager, wistful manner concerning the youth.

"Thy fair son was but a lad; this fellow is a man grown," returned the king.

"My Raoul would have been hard unto eighteen years had he lived. I was full grown at eighteen. What did he call himself? And how did he say he escaped the fury of the peasants?"

"He called himself Raoul; his friends, the peasants, called him Dieu-donné. He said he was thrown over the castle wall, and struck on his head, so that he forgot all his former life for three years. If he be a varlet, he is marvellously shrewd, for he hath the look

and manner of a gentleman, though he hath none the appearance of my lord count," said the Sieur de Clermont, who would have been glad enough to have Raoul's tale turn out to be true. "The youth has blue eyes, fair skin, and bronze-colored hair. My lord, on the contrary, has dark eyes and hair, and is of dark complexion," added the Sieur de Clermont.

"My wife was of the same complexion as thou sayst this boy is. I fain would see him. It is possible that your majesty failed to recognize him, as he was but a small boy when I presented him to your majesty," said the count respectfully.

But the king would entertain no such possibility; and then Almeric began describing Raoul's appearance the first time he laid eyes on him, and made merry at his expense, and displayed so much wit in his talk that King John was well pleased, and dismissed the matter without further thought.

But the count pondered long over the possibility that the youth might be his son, and when the royal visit ended, he announced his intention of accompanying his majesty to Paris, while the Sieur de Clermont started homeward, going south in the direction of Orleans.

On the way to the capital the count asked permission to visit the youth in prison who had called himself his son, so as to set all doubt at rest.

The king readily gave his consent, saying that he

knew not where the fellow was confined, but he would have the matter searched into, and he should have an order to the governor to see the prisoner.

Shortly after their arrival at the Louvre the Count of Rainault reminded his majesty of his promise. King John summoned his secretary, bade him make inquiries of the High Court, and to write the order for the count to see the youth calling himself Raoul, le Dieu-donné.

Armed with his letter, the anxious father, his heart beating fast with the hope that he might possibly soon clasp his son to his breast, made the short journey to the prison fortress where Raoul had now been confined for nearly a month. He had no difficulty in gaining admittance to the fortress when he showed his order bearing the royal seal. He was taken to the governor, to whom he made known his desire to see one of his prisoners.

The governor called to the chaplain to read the order. As the priest began to read, his jaw dropped, his hands trembled so that the paper rattled. As he finished, the governor swore a lusty oath.

“What does this mean?” he thundered. “Why should there be sent another order for a prisoner who has already been delivered into the custody of him sent by the High Court of Paris to convey him to Paris? He has been gone since yesterday morning.”

The Count of Rainault did not wait for the enter-

tainment offered him by the governor, but departed immediately for the capital to report the fact of Raoul's release to the king.

King John had gone away to attend a great hunt, and it was not known when he would return. The count applied to the clerk of the High Court, who directed him to the residences of the judges. But they knew nothing of the matter; they had not thought of the youth since they had commanded the clerk to make out the summons for his witnesses, and sent the fellow back to prison.

The king was gone several days. As soon as he returned to the Louvre, the Count of Rainault begged an audience, and told him the result of his visit. King John was astounded that any one dare meddle with a prisoner of the High Court. He bade his secretaries to inquire into the matter. They could learn no more than had the count.

“They have slain the youth, or else he has died from starvation, and they have disposed of his body,” said the count.

“I will myself go and see into this matter, and find out who has dared interfere with the proceedings of the court of justice,” declared the king. And he ordered his horse and attendants to be ready within an hour.

The king was received with all the ceremony befitting his station, the governor meeting him at the

fortress gate. But his face was the hue of death, his lips twitched, and he could not meet the king eye to eye. After he had conducted the king to the state chamber and to the seat of honor, he fell on his knees before him and cried:

“ Mercy, sire. I beg your most gracious majesty’s clemency. It was all a mistake!”

The king bade him arise and explain his strange words. The prostrate man continued on his knees, and told a tale that caused the king to summon the guards and order his arrest, bidding them take their prisoner to the Louvre, to be confined during his majesty’s pleasure.

CHAPTER XXVII.

YSOBEL'S PROJECTED MARRIAGE.

The Lady Ysobel grew weary of watching day after day the stretch of white road that led towards Paris, as week after week went by without bringing back her father and his suite. She bade Dame Marie-Anne get out the tapestry frames that they might finish the altar-piece they were embroidering for the chapel. And it so happened that when she no longer watched, there came the blast of the horn outside the castle gate, announcing the lord's return. Quickly were the tapestry frames pushed aside, and then with flying steps Ysobel rushed down to the courtyard, reaching it just in time to greet her father as he dismounted from his horse. As he kissed her forehead, she looked past his shoulder, expecting to see Raoul's familiar face. But it was not there.

"You have not all returned," she said. "Has any misfortune happened to you, my dear father, that you return after so long an absence, and that one of your squires is not with you?"

"Thou hast sharp eyes, little one," answered her father. "'Tis a long tale for an empty stomach. Give

us food and drink, and I'll tell thee all the news later."

With this Ysobel was obliged to content herself for the present. Meat and wine were brought the hungry travellers, who were soon too busily engaged in supplying the demands of a healthy appetite to talk. All the while they were eating, Ysobel waited as patiently as she could for the news she was so anxious, yet so fearful, to hear. At length, their hunger satisfied, the board was cleared of everything save the cups of wine. Still the Sieur de Clermont did not speak.

"But, my father, you have told me nothing of your visit," suggested Ysobel.

"Thou art impatient. Maids must learn the lesson of patience; 'tis a virtue they will often be called upon to practise," responded the lord of the castle oracularly after waiting to imbibe a long draught of the sparkling wine.

"Patience, forsooth!" sighed Ysobel to herself. "That's but a woman's portion in this life! All the honor and glory and adventure come to the men, while women, perchance, must wait and watch and weep. Why were we not all born men?" Her sigh was so deep and long that it attracted her father's attention, so he began slowly and with many words to tell her all that had happened to him since he bade her farewell over a month before.

She listened without interrupting him once even to

ask a question. He described all the incidents with the garrulity that a good dinner, good wine, and a good listener inspire. Finally he came to the day when Raoul was arrested for interrupting the ceremony investing Almeric de Ragueneel with the fief of Rainault, by declaring that he himself was the rightful heir to Rainault.

Then Ysobel could restrain herself no longer.

"Did he say he was in verity the son of the Count of Rainault?" she asked.

"Pardie, he not only said so, but swore to it, and stuck to his oath most contumaciously."

"Then indeed is he the son of the lord Count of Rainault!" pronounced Ysobel decisively.

The Sieur de Clermont regarded his daughter with an expression conveying decided disapprobation for a few seconds, then he said in displeased tones:

"A young maid should not meddle with affairs above her understanding, nor set up a judgment contrary to her king's or her father's."

"But, my father," exclaimed Ysobel, not at all silenced by this rebuke, for she was too wrought upon by the knowledge of Raoul's fate to think of herself, "do you believe Raoul would swear to a lie?"

"He has been bewitched. He is still under the spell of the old *sorcière* who bewitched him when he was in Brittany."

"He has not acted like one bewitched. Has he not proved himself a gallant youth, my father?"

"Pardie, yes, in all but this."

"Can he not be saved?" Ysobel arose from her chair and went to her father and took his hand in hers, as if to compel him to do something.

He stroked her hair soothingly and said: "Do not distress thyself about a stranger youth. Fortunately, he is not of our family."

"But, my father, he aided me when I was in trouble and imprisoned in the castle of one unknown to us. Can you not do something for him?"

"My daughter, thy father does not need to have thee remind him of any good action done him or one of his. Nor did I wait for thee to ask me to use my services in his behalf. But he is the king's prisoner, and I can do nothing."

Ysobel felt it a poor thing to be a girl and to have a dear one in peril. But she could do nothing more. If she mentioned the matter to her father, he told her that a maid's concern was the household, and not the succor of contumacious youths. Then he bethought him it was time to make a woman of her. Was she not of a marriageable age? He must inquire. So the next time he saw Ysobel he asked her how old she was.

"Sixteen years last fête-day of Ste. Marie," was the answer.

"Yes," he said to himself, "she must be a bride before another of her fête-days arrives."

But there were no eligible suitors at hand, as the young nobles were at court or in service with some fighting prince. He must enter into negotiation with some lord for a union between their respective son and daughter. It would not be difficult to arrange, certainly.

Such was the condition of affairs when late one afternoon the notes of a horn announced visitors. They were quickly welcomed, even before it was known who they might be; but when they proved to be the Count of Rainault and Messire de Raguenel and their attendants they were made doubly welcome.

As Almeric de Raguenel's eyes fell upon the young lady of the castle, it seemed to him that never had he seen so lovely a maid. Her sparkling beauty, her dainty grace, her gracious dignity of manner in receiving her father's guests, captivated his fancy at once. He had seen many ladies in different places, and had been favored by them on account of his handsome person, but to his mind the little lady of Clermont surpassed them all in beauty and grace.

But Lady Ysobel had no thought of his grace and beauty; she regarded him with indifference until she learned that he had known her friend Raoul. After a little, however, her quick intuition told her that this fine youth who spoke so fair was Raoul's enemy, and

would work him all the injury he could. She did not need to see the sneer with which he mentioned his name, or the angry glitter in his eyes when the Count of Rainault let some word drop that showed he felt the unfortunate youth to be his son.

The Count of Rainault explained the reason of his visit. He told them how he had gone to see the imprisoned youth who proclaimed himself to be his son, in hopes that he might be speaking the truth, and how the youth was no longer in the fortress whether he had been conveyed by order of the court; that the governor said he had been taken away on an order from the High Court of Justice, but that no one believed him, and the king had caused him to be seized and thrown into prison.

“Why does the governor not produce the order?” asked the Sieur de Clermont.

“He says he has lost it.”

“Have the judges denied sending for the prisoner?”

“Absolutely, my lord.”

“Tis a strange proceeding, certainly.”

“I believe the youth has been slain, or else has been starved to death, and his body thrown into the Seine,” said the Count of Rainault.

There was a low cry. Ysobel had risen from her chair and stood with one hand pressing against her heart as if to quiet its beating, while her white, drawn face told of her agony.

"The demoiselle is ill—look to her!" cried the count.

"No," she murmured; "it is nothing. If my father will permit, I will withdraw."

"These gentlemen will no doubt excuse thee, *ma petite*. Thou art indeed ill. Ho, there, summon Dame Marie-Anne!" the Sieur de Clermont cried to one of the serviteurs.

"No, it is unnecessary," interrupted the Lady Ysobel, and, courtesying deeply, she retired from the apartment with uncertain steps. Once in her own chamber and alone, she threw herself down on her couch and gave way to a flood of tears.

Could it be possible that Raoul, her dear friend, had been murdered?

Almeric at once guessed the reason of the girl's distress, and he determined to drive Raoul's image from her heart and to replace it by his own. So the next morning he assumed a most respectfully solicitous manner, and inquired after her health with so much apparent concern that Ysobel felt in her heart she had done her father's guest injustice. Later he spoke of Raoul kindly as if he would be his friend if he could, and regretted his hallucination in regard to his being the son of the Count of Rainault. He said that he would plead with the king to release him after his majesty's anger had cooled a little; and acquitted himself with so much adroitness that Ysobel's

suspicions were allayed, and she tried to make herself agreeable to the young man, so that he would do as he had promised in regard to Raoul.

Hunting parties were arranged for the entertainment of the guests of Château de Clermont; these Ysobel did not join; but when they went hawking she was very glad to be told by her father that she could be of the party. Almeric then rode by her side and never left her till they were once more within the castle walls; when she would modestly sing for them, accompanying herself on the lyre, his praise was none the less gratifying because spoken with murmured word and eloquent glance.

The days passed on. Count de Rainault seemed loath to leave the château and return to his desolated home, and Almeric was too well entertained in trying to steal the heart of the young châtelaine from her absent lover to wish to hurry his departure.

Raoul, however, was by no means forgotten either by his father or his sweet girl friend. They often talked together of him, and inspired by her faith in the youth, the count at length became convinced that he was indeed his son, and mourned his fate anew. In spite of all the inquiries he made, he could learn nothing of the missing prisoner. He asked about Iron Hand, and when he learned what inseparable companions they had been until Iron Hand's acceptance of the offer made him by the Duke of Orleans,

he wished to see him. So he rode to Orleans, but found that he was absent on a mission of his lord.

The visit of the two knights at length came to an end, and the two gentlemen rode away, the one to his empty home, the other to the court of King John.

The Sieur de Clermont had viewed with much satisfaction the unconcealed admiration of Messire de Raguenel for his daughter, and had often let slip, as it were, that her *dot* would not be an insignificant one, for she was his only child. Almeric had so ingratiated himself with the Count of Rainault that he had declared his intention of asking the king to permit him to make him his heir in case his own son were never heard of again.

In due time came the formal request to the Sieur de Clermont for the hand of his daughter, the Lady Ysobel, for Messire Almeric de Raguenel. The offer was accepted, and Ysobel was bidden by her father to prepare for her wedding.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE WEDDING MORN.

It was decided that the marriage of the Lady Ysobel with Messire de Raguenel should not take place till spring; for so soon as the Lady Blanche heard that her cousin was to be married, she expressed a desire to attend the wedding, but as the roads were then almost impassable from rains and frost, it would be too much of an undertaking for her to travel from Brittany to Orléannois.

The winter months were dreary indeed to Ysobel. Her whole being revolted against the idea of marriage with Almeric de Raguenel. She had pleaded and expostulated with her father to permit her rather to retire to a convent than to wed with one whom she did not like, but he was kindly inexorable, patting her head, or kissing her forehead, and saying in soothing tones:

“ Tut, tut, *petite*, thou’lt be happy enough. Maids never know their own minds. Has thy father looked after thee so long, and does he love thee so well, in the end to do aught that will not be the best for

thee? Thou'd soon weary to death of cloister life, thy cheeks would pale, and thy bright eyes fade, and in less that a twelvemonth thou'd be like a poor starved mouse. I'll marry thee to this gallant gentleman and brave knight, and thou'l live to thank me for it."

Ysobel was often tempted to run away. But where could she go alone and unprotected? None of her relatives would give her shelter if they knew that she had left her father's house to avoid a marriage that he had arranged for her. Girls in those days were not supposed to know whom they wanted to marry; they were expected to do as they were bid. She begged the lady abbess of the nunnery, where she had been taught all the essentials of a young lady's education, to receive her; but she was reminded that obedience was the first rule of the church, and if she would not obey her father, neither could she be trusted to obey those in authority over her in the convent.

January passed; February grew and waned; March proclaimed itself with its tempestuous winds; and then, all too soon to Ysobel, appeared April, green, sunny, and hopeful. The wedding was set for the first week in May, and the intervening time was full of bustle and preparation. Ysobel felt so weak and ill that she hoped to die before her bridal morn. She had prayed, fasted, and wept; visited all the shrines in the vicinity, supplicating that a miracle might in-

tervene to prevent the dreaded marriage. Gladly would she have died to escape her fate.

She anxiously watched for the arrival of her cousin. Lady Blanche was so strong, so self-willed, she was sure that if she could only make her see the matter in the same light she did, that energetic lady would manage to prevent the ceremony.

The Sieur de Clermont having but one daughter to marry, made up his mind that the occasion should be one that would be long remembered. So he sent out invitations to all good knights to attend a tourney that was to be given in his daughter's honor; and Almeric then issued a challenge to any who might wish to tilt with him. When Ysobel learned of this it gave her new hope, for she was sure that Sir Griffith could unseat any knight, and perhaps—who could tell? such things had happened before—Messire de Raguenel might receive a mortal wound. Then she repented her thought; for was not wishing another's death, murder in the heart? And she did penance for her wickedness, and tried to become reconciled to her fate.

Most gladly was the invitation of the Sieur de Clermont accepted, even by those who did not intend entering the lists against Messire de Raguenel. The tournament was to continue four days: on the first were to be held the trials of strength in throwing the javelin and lance, shooting the bow, leaping, and in performing feats of horsemanship; the second day was

to be devoted to passages of arms with several knights on either side; the third was assigned to tilting matches between two combatants; and the fourth and last, the day preceding the wedding, was to be given to Messire de Raguenel and any knight or knights who might accept his challenge to a single-handed encounter.

Haughty lords arrayed in splendid robes, their armor borne by their squires, and imperious knights, clad in glittering mail and riding richly caparisoned chargers, responded to the invitation. Hearty was the welcome extended to all, lavish were the feasts prepared for them, and loud rang the castle with jest, laughter, and song.

Below in the courtyard and in the great common hall, where were the archers and men-at-arms, it was no less gay, for they enjoyed these jousts almost as much as their masters.

The tournament began, and the prowess of the bridegroom-elect elicited much admiration, for none could throw farther, leap higher, or aim truer than he. In the passages at arms between the knights his side was nearly always victorious. In the sports of the third day he did not participate, but watched the others tilt, and lustily applauded the victor.

On the fourth day came his greatest triumph. Even his unwilling bride could not but yield a reluctant admiration to his prowess and skill in his encounters

with the knights who offered to break a lance with him. All the honor of the day was his; no one but thought he had proved his worth, and no one but thought he deserved the bride of his choice.

It was the night before the marriage morn. Gradually the stir and noise in the castle and court had ceased, the lights were extinguished, and all had retired—all save one, and she was keeping a solitary vigil far up in her turreted chamber; she now had abandoned all hope, for neither her cousin nor her husband had appeared.

It was two hours before midnight when the clatter of horses' hoofs broke out upon the clear night air. A moment later a party of horsemen emerged from the shadow of the woods into the open moonlight before the castle gates. A shrill blast of a horn was heard—once, twice, thrice, then a pause followed by a prolonged note.

Sir Griffith and his retinue at length had arrived, after having been detained by a freshet so that they were obliged to travel by moonlight in order to reach the castle in time for the wedding, which was to take place early the next morning. Presently lighted torches moved about in the courtyard, then the creaking of the great oaken doors was heard, and the thump of the drawbridge as it was let down, and a moment later the clatter of the iron-shod hoofs on the stone pavement of the court.

Ysobel's heart lightened. She opened the door of her chamber so as to intercept her cousin on her way to her apartment; and when Lady Blanche was traversing the corridor she suddenly felt herself clasped by two arms, and a warm kiss pressed upon her cheek. She uttered a startled exclamation, though before it left her lips she knew that it was Ysobel who had pounced upon her so unexpectedly. She permitted herself to be led into Ysobel's room, which was lighted only by the moonlight that streamed in the open casement. Ysobel pushed her cousin down into a chair, and then kneeling down at her side, begged her to save her from the hated marriage.

"My poor cousin, and is it that the marriage is distasteful to thee?" she asked, smoothing the dark hair from her pale sweet face.

"Rather would I die!" exclaimed Ysobel passionately. "In vain have I beseeched my father to permit me to enter the convent."

"But why, dear one? Almeric I well know. He is brave, handsome, and well born, just such a one as to suit a young maid's fancy. What more dost thou wish?"

"Yet is the thought of wedding with him abhorrent to me. Think, think of some way to save me!"

"But first tell me why thou shouldst regard this marriage with aversion."

Then with many pauses and with much hesitation

Ysobel told her cousin why she believed Almeric to be Raoul's enemy. The Lady Blanche had no difficulty in penetrating Ysobel's secret. She soon found out that her heart had already been given to Raoul. Yet did she try to persuade her young cousin that the marriage was in every way suitable, and that she had misjudged the man whom her father had selected to be her husband. She besought her to trust to her father's love and to believe that he would counsel nothing that was not for her happiness. Her distaste for the marriage, she told her, was only a maid's natural repugnance to changing her condition; that in a few months she would be ready to acknowledge the wisdom of her father's choice.

"Thou thought differently once," replied Ysobel sadly. "Thou refused to marry a man for whom thou didst not care."

They talked a long time. The moonlight gave place to the first gray streaks of dawn. Three hours later, when Dame Marie-Anne entered the chamber of her beloved nursling to array her for her wedding, the Lady Ysobel had disappeared!

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE RETURN TO BRITTANY.

At first Dame Marie-Anne was not at all disconcerted by the absence of the Lady Ysobel from her chamber, thinking she had gone down early to the chapel to pray, which was very becoming in one on the eve of marriage. She waited patiently for a time; then, impatiently; finally she became very much annoyed, as the time was short and it would be treating the bridegroom but ill to keep him long waiting. She went forth to seek her young lady, but nowhere she visited could she find her. It was not till she had looked into every likely place, and many an unlikely one, without discovering any trace of her, did she report her disappearance to the Sieur de Clermont. He laughed at her anxiety at first, but when he too had searched, and questioned all the serviteurs regarding her and could learn nothing about her, he became anxious also.

Lady Ysobel was deeply beloved by all the inhabitants of the castle on account of her endearing ways, whether their condition was high or low. Every one now remembered how unlike a happy prospective

bride she had appeared the last month, how faint had been her smile, and how no one had heard her merry laugh or her sweet voice lilting in gay carols, for many a day.

The dreadful fear lay heavy upon their hearts that she had made way with herself. Every one questioned the other as to when she had last been seen.

In the midst of an anxious consultation of Dame Marie-Anne and the lord of the castle with the officers of the household, there appeared a fresh personage upon the scene. This was no other than Lady Blanche, whom the Sieur de Clermont now first saw since her arrival. On inquiring into the matter that concerned them so strongly, she was informed of the young girl's disappearance. It seemed that she was the last one who had spoken with her, for she told how she had gone to her on her arrival and spent at least an hour with her, talking of her wedding.

"And what were her spirits—high or low?" asked the father anxiously.

"When I first spoke with her she begged me to prevent the marriage if I loved her. But I told her how impossible that would be, and represented to her the good qualities of her *fiancé*, and how she would soon learn to regard him with favor after she was married. By the time I had finished she seemed quite reconciled," replied Lady Blanche.

Still the moat was dragged, and messengers sent in

all directions to see if she had left the castle, though by what means she could have done so none could conjecture, as all the gates had been found closed. But no trace of her could be found.

The Sieur de Clermont silently reproached himself for not heeding his daughter's pleadings, all the while declaring, however, that if she could provide for her future better than could a loving father and a gallant husband, she was free to do so.

Almeric was more astonished than anxious. He had not conceived the possibility of any young lady being indifferent to him, much less that she should run away from her father's house to avoid marrying him. He lost sight of all his triumphs of the preceding days. He believed he was an object of ridicule to all the assembled guests. He would have liked to have challenged one and all to a single combat, and when Sir Griffith ventured some well-meant but rather tactless attempts at consolation, very much to his surprise he received a challenge to mortal combat.

For answer, Sir Griffith silently stood by the angry young knight, and looked down upon his slender form from his greater height, and then glanced meaningly at the assembled company. Then he said patronizingly:

“Sir Knight, I forgive thy choler because thou art sorely touched thyself. But I will give thee a bit of advice—when thou wouldest fight, select some one

near thy own size. What chance hast thou against this arm?" and he stretched out that brawny member so suddenly and strongly against a hitching-post in the courtyard where they were standing that he loosened it from its foundations in the stone-paved court.

Almeric was too angry to be discreet; he made no verbal answer to Sir Griffith, but raised his hand and deliberately struck him in the face with his gauntlet.

"*Mort de ma vie!* But that is too much! We will proceed to this affair at once." He called to his attendants to get ready his armor and horse, Almeric doing the same.

The fight was to take place on a level plain just outside the castle walls. The whole company assembled to witness it, except the lord of the castle and the Lady Blanche, who kept much to her own apartments, save when she thought to hear some news of the missing one as any of the searching parties returned.

It was a short combat, for Sir Griffith had every advantage—strength, coolness, and good temper. Almeric, on the contrary, showed none of his customary skill and adroitness, for he was furiously angry, therefore excited and impetuous. Seeing this, Sir Griffith, who was eminently a good-hearted man, and had a liking for his adversary, disabled him, doing him as little injury as possible. By a skilful thrust of his lance he struck the young knight in the thigh, pro-

ducing a flesh wound, which bled freely, compelling the encounter to cease.

Two more days passed without any news of the missing girl. The mortification of Almeric had brought on a fever in his weakened state from loss of blood. The other guests departed as soon as they decently could, and Sir Griffith grew weary of the dismal atmosphere of the Château de Clermont, consequently bade his wife prepare for their homeward journey.

The Lady Blanche at first demurred at leaving Clermont before they had any news of that sweet girl, her dear cousin. She had shown great distress over the unknown fate of Ysobel, refusing to mingle with the remainder of the guests even at table, having her food brought to her to her own apartment by one of her waiting-women. But Sir Griffith was inexorable, and his wife knew that when he had once set his mind upon a thing he would do it; therefore, she said she would be ready the following morning.

The Count of Rainault had been one of the guests bidden to the wedding, and accepted with alacrity Sir Griffith's invitation to go with him to Brittany. The Welsh knight and French count had become good friends. When Sir Griffith heard of Raoul's claim to being the son of the count, he immediately proclaimed his belief in the youth, saying he had always seen he was no common lad. He offered to go to Paris be-

fore the High Court of Justice and give his testimony; but there was no use of that now that the boy had been done away with in so mysterious a manner. The principal reason, however, for the acceptance of the count of Sir Griffith's invitation was the knowledge that there was a war going on in Brittany between the two rival claimants for the duchy, and it would give him occupation for his thoughts, and take them off from forever dwelling upon his bereavement.

The journey westward was made without incident. The two knights rode the greater part of the way side by side, the Lady Blanche and her attendants following, the male escort bringing up the rear. It was noticed that the lady had added a stranger page to her train, the son of one of the neighbors, she said, who wished to begin his education in her household. It was the fashion then for the children of nobles to be placed in the households of lords higher in rank, that they might become learned in all the arts of society. The boys entered the suite of the châtelaine as pages, being afterward elevated to the rank of squires, when they attended upon the lord; the next step was knighthood. In case with the girls, they were either sent to a convent to be taught the art of nursing and healing, and the use of the needle, as well as how to conduct a household, or taken into the household of some high dame.

The Lady Blanche would hardly let the boy out of

her sight; she gave as reason for her watchfulness that the lad was homesick and averse to leaving his family, and she feared he might attempt to run away. At night she locked him up to sleep in a closet off her own sleeping chamber.

They arrived at Esticourt in the middle of the afternoon. All retired to their apartments to refresh themselves after their long journey. At five o'clock dinner was served, and much to the astonishment of all save the lady of Esticourt, there appeared at the board, seated next to her cousin, the Lady Ysobel.

Sir Griffith was both astonished and angry. He regarded Ysobel's escape with the connivance and aid of his wife as a breach of faith to him who had entertained them so hospitably, and who had no thought of having his hospitality outraged in this manner. At first he swore he would himself conduct the girl back to her father's house. Then Lady Blanche spoke up in her cousin's behalf. For a time he was so angry that he would not listen to her, so she waited till he had stormed out of his rage, then said with a sweet archness:

“Ah, my lord, had I been as dutiful a niece as thou wouldst have this dear girl be daughter, I would not have been here; instead, I should have been the wife of another, eating out my heart in sorrow.”

He looked at her in silence. She had gained one

point at least, for he had listened to her. She continued:

“Did I not know better how to choose for myself than did another to choose for me?”

“Thou didst well, certainly,” he answered with a fond glance.

“Might not another do as well?” she asked.

“Perchance another maid might, but not another man,” he replied.

Then she knew her point was gained.

“My dear cousin is my guest and charge,” she said. “If her father wants her, let him come after her. We will send a messenger to him to-morrow, telling of his daughter’s safety. Dame Marie-Anne was told just before we left, but she promised not to breathe a word to my uncle until she should hear from us.”

“Thou wilt always get thy own way,” returned Sir Griffith, half grumblingly; but Lady Blanche was relieved of a great dread, for she had feared that he might insist upon returning Ysobel to her father, despite all her pleadings.

“How didst thou manage to spirit her away?” he asked.

“On the night of our arrival,” replied the châtelaine, “I went at once to my dear cousin’s apartment, and found her ready to die of grief at the thought of the marriage. Her pretty eyes were red with weeping,

her cheeks white and thin by fasting, while her fingers looked like bird-claws, so had her grief preyed upon her. I made her tell me all her trouble. She wept much while telling me, and I wept with her. She begged me to give her a sleeping draught from which she would never waken. But I represented to her how that would shut us both out of Heaven. Then she implored me to take her away with me to Brittany. I told her that was more reasonable and more difficult. But we talked long over the idea, and finally I be-thought me of the idea of taking her with me as a page. She went with me to my apartment, where I kept her in a closet so long as thou wert about; when thou didst leave the room she sat with me. One of my women was in the secret, and she brought us our food. She also made a page's dress for Ysobel, and that was the reason why I was loath to depart so soon, for she had to sit up and sew by the light of a torch. I was afraid she would be discovered, but all went well; and here is the demoiselle, and here will she remain until my good uncle promises not to force her into a marriage for which she has no liking."

The messenger to the Sieur de Clermont was duly despatched. In course of time he returned with a letter, written at the dictation of the Sieur de Clermont, which read:

"Madame, my fair niece: As my daughter, the

Lady Ysobel, has fled clandestinely her father's house to avoid doing his bidding, she may remain with thee or betake herself to a nunnery. But let her take heed lest she bring dishonor on her own head and sorrow and disgrace on that of her loving father."

Ysobel shed many tears over this brief message, and would have returned immediately to solicit her father's pardon for her disobedience, had her cousin provided her with an escort. But the Lady Blanche had a woman's wit, and divined that her uncle was greatly rejoiced at the safety of his daughter, but was still annoyed at the contrariness he thought her conduct to spring from. Time would heal the breach between father and daughter. In the meantime Ysobel should be made as happy and contented in her cousin's home as possible.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE BRAVE YOUTH OF JINAN.

The war in Brittany between Charles of Blois and Jean of Montfort had broken out afresh. The contestants were pretty evenly matched, for the Count of Blois was supported by the King of France, who was his uncle; while the Count of Montfort had found an ally in Edward III., King of England.

The walled and strongly fortified city of Jinan was a desired stronghold, and was in possession of the Blois faction. It was a precarious advantage, however, for the Montfort party, with a large reinforcement of the English, had the city closely invested; supplies were completely cut off, and the besieged were in a state of starvation. Of the last-named fact the Montforts were in ignorance. Charles of Blois was harassing the Montfort territory, and the besieging army was anxious to raise the siege on as favorable terms as they could succeed in making, and to go to the aid of their companions. They had sent a herald with a flag of truce to ask a parley with the rulers of the town. The besiegers offered to permit the garrison to go out under arms; the high magistrates to

remain in charge of the city, provided they would take the oath of allegiance to the Count of Montfort; and to engage not to despoil the rich bourgeois if they would pay a certain sum for immunity. But of the people no mention was made whatever. That omission meant that they were to be at the mercy of the soldiers, who were to get out of them the wages of war.

The result of the parley was proclaimed in the market-place, where the people of the town had been summoned by the tocsin. Those who were promised immunity from harm were vehemently in favor of surrender on the terms offered; the people were dully quiescent. Food was almost gone; it was only the rich who could procure it; hunger had done its work upon them so thoroughly that they were now little more than "breathing corpses," with little desire to prolong their existence. They even felt that quick death by the sword was no worse than a lingering one by slow starvation; besides, there was the bare chance that the conquerors would temper their victory with mercy.

Suddenly from out the throng of mutely despairing people there sprung to the centre of the market-place and up on to a stand that had once been covered with fruits and vegetables, the tall lithe figure of a youth dressed in brown cloth such as worn by the bourgeois. Raising his right hand in a gesture half of entreaty, half of command, he begged the people to pause and

consider before deciding their fate. In a few rapid, burning words, his clear tones ringing throughout the whole square of the market-place, he pictured the horrors of a town delivered to sack and pillage. He showed how the terms offered by the besiegers did not include the people who were always the greatest sufferers, and he implored them to wait but three days more, when succor might come.

His earnestness impressed the people, and his conviction that aid might reasonably be expected, aroused a slight hope in their breasts. But the opulent class and the magistrates urged the surrender, saying that every day's delay would cause the besiegers to offer harder terms. "Let us agree to the conditions," said one of the upper bourgeois, who had much property at stake, and who thought the sum he would be called upon to-day would be less than it would be three days hence—"let us agree to the conditions, and then delegate six of our most influential citizens to plead with the enemy to spare the people."

Again the youth broke forth in a passionate appeal for time, saying that it would then be too late to make conditions; they could only abide by them.

The magistrates ordered him to keep silence, and not to disturb the peace of the city by his seditious talk. But he was too strongly moved by the thought of the probable fate of the great mass of the citizens, unless special care was taken of them, to take into

account the probable result to himself of his rashness, and he spoke again, repeating his request for delay.

The chief magistrate of the city gave a signal to the guard; a few men-at-arms pushed forward to arrest the daring youth, but the people closed in about him, a dull roar of many voices filled the air, and the youth found himself surrounded by a bodyguard of the populace. He smiled on them, and the beauty of his smile was so remarkable that it strengthened his hold upon the people. He thanked them for their championship, and begged them to be patient a few days longer, in order that aid might come to them. Then sinking on his knees on his elevated stand, and stretching both arms out toward the magistrates, he begged for a private interview, saying that he had a plan to propose for the salvation of the town. At worst, it would be but deferring an answer to the proposition of the enemy for three days.

At length he was told to present himself at the town hall within an hour, and the magistrates would listen to what he had to propose.

The interview was a long one, but the young man won his point, and a herald was sent to the camp requesting three days' grace, a written promise being given that if at the end of that time relief did not arrive they would capitulate on the terms offered.

The besiegers had to content themselves with this

condition. Had they known the extremity to which the people were reduced for lack of provision, they would have denied the request; but they were not as strong as it was believed, and thought best to yield that much.

Just before nightfall a gate of the city opened, and from it there emerged a slender dark-robed figure on horseback; by its side marched a huge man in armor, without device and with visor closed. A hood also concealed the face of the man on horseback. They moved slowly, and were soon challenged by one of the sentinels that encircled the city. The rider asked to be taken to the tent of the commanding knight, and in a short time the two envoys from Jinan found themselves in the midst of the enemy's camp. On arriving before the tent of the knight commander, their presence was announced. Permission was given the rider to enter; the footman was told to wait without. As the rider dismounted, the cloak fell from the shoulders and revealed a woman's form dressed in a flowing robe of black velvet. As she stepped within the tent and the light of the lamps fell upon her face and form, it showed a young woman of great beauty and commanding presence. The rich velvet that draped her figure threw out the fairness of her skin and accentuated the color of her golden-brown hair. There were four knights within the tent playing at draughts. As they saw that their guest was a

woman they sprang to their feet and bowed low before her.

There was no shrinking from their bold, admiring glances, no maiden timidity in her bearing; on the contrary, she bore herself proudly, plainly showing that she feared no one. She paused an instant at the entrance of the tent, her eyes a little dazzled by the bright light shed by the lamps, for without it was almost dark; then she said in cool, collected tones:

“Pardon, my lords, I would see him who is in command.”

“Behold him in me, madame,” said one of the gentlemen, drawing himself up to his full stature, and putting his best foot forward, assuming what was acknowledged to be his most graceful pose.

The young woman dropped a courtesy.

“I have come, my lord,” she said, “to plead for the citizens of Jinan. The city would be yielded to you to-morrow if guarantee were given that the lives and property of the people were to be preserved and respected.”

“Terms for surrender rest with the victor, not with the vanquished, madame,” he replied; then added with an air of gallantry, “But for so fair an envoy would we do much. Will not madame be seated, that we may deliberate at leisure?”

The young woman accepted the proffered seat. Her eyes fell on the flagons of wine. The look was in-

tercepted and interpreted as a silent request by the knight commander.

“Permit me, madame,” he said quickly, “to offer you some slight refreshment after your ride.”

“If my lord will permit me to sip from his cup,” she replied with an engaging smile. The flagon was immediately handed her. She merely touched the brim with her lips, touching none of its contents, and returned the cup with a coquettish glance. The owner of the flagon drained it at once, and called to have it refilled. Then the other three knights begged to be shown the same favor, and as often as she touched the brimming cup, so often was it emptied and refilled. Negotiations were suspended. The four knights vied with one another in their gallant speeches and attentions to their fair guest. At length she begged for an answer, saying she must return to the city before midnight. But the gallant lords protested against her leaving them so soon, saying it were impossible to arrange terms before morning, and that they would send her attendant back to the city with news of her safety and the prospect of a compromise in the morning. Her attendant should be escorted out of camp and to the gates of Jinan if madame so wished. But she replied it were sufficient if they would but pass him through the line of sentinels, then he could take care of himself.

One of the knights stepped outside and gave the

necessary order, bidding the man-at-arms tell the magistrates that madame would return in the morning with accommodating terms for the people duly drawn up and signed. He saluted and disappeared without a word in the darkness, under the guidance of two camp attendants, who were given the password.

Meanwhile the young woman was singing for the entertainment of her hosts, drawing a crowd of listeners to the door of the tent. The four knights by this time had drunk much more than was good for them, and were in an uncertain state of mind. One overturned his flagon, which rolled against a lamp that was set upon the table, upsetting it and extinguishing its flame; in an instant the light of the other lamp was out, and the tent was in utter darkness. Orders were given to attendants to bring fresh lights; there were a hurrying and scurrying hither and thither among the crowd outside, and when the lamps were brought, the young woman was nowhere to be seen.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE CAMP OF THE COUNT OF BLOIS.

The night was very dark and a stiff breeze was blowing, so that no one noticed the darkly clad figure as it made its way through the camp in an opposite direction from where the rider and her attendant had entered a few hours before. It would be a more difficult thing to pass the line of sentinels than to cross the camp, but that could be more easily accomplished from within than from without; besides, the watch was not very strictly kept, for spies could do little harm to the besieging army.

The young woman watched until the sentinel pacing the particular point whence she wished to emerge had turned his back upon her, then slipped out into the open, her feet fairly skimming over the ground, so rapid was her flight. After she had run a considerable distance, she paused, gave a bird-call, waited till there came an answer, then sped onward in the direction whence it came. She could scarcely see the ground, so dark was the night, but she was sure-footed and fleet, and in a few moments had come up to where her former attendant was waiting with her horse.

"All safe?" he asked as she reached his side.

"Yes, but it was a risky enterprise. Here, take this," and quickly slipping off the black-velvet robe, the supposed young woman showed herself to be a young man dressed in a suit of brown cloth such as the youth in the market-place had worn that very morning when he pleaded the people's cause. In fact, it was no other than he. He had employed this stratagem to elude the vigilance of the enemy, who had so effectually blockaded the fortress city that it was impossible for any one to leave its gates without their knowledge. It was an extremely hazardous undertaking, for had the youth been suspected and his disguise penetrated he would have been put ignominiously to death, perhaps after having endured the *question* to force him to tell all he knew about the resources of the city.

He leaped upon his horse, expecting to make the midnight journey southward to the camp of the Count of Blois alone, but he found his armed attendant by his side, mounted on a powerful horse, which he had managed to procure by means unknown to his master.

It was some time after sun-up before the two riders reached the camp of the Count of Blois. The youth begged to be taken at once to the tent of the French prince, as he had an important communication to make to his highness.

He was conducted to his tent, but was obliged to wait without until the count had performed his devotions. It was a weary half-hour for the youth, who had ridden the best part of the night and had fasted since sunset. But Prince Charles was very devout; he confessed morning and evening, and heard mass as many as four or five times a day. He systematically mortified the flesh to rout the devil, and would allow nothing to disturb his devotions, not even a quickly rising tide, which he said God would divert from overwhelming him if it were His will.

When the youth of Jinan was admitted into his presence, the boy was surprised to see so high a prince in so sorry a condition. He was clothed in a long loose robe of sackcloth, that was girded about his waist by a stout rope. Afterward, he was told that the pious prince girded his body next to the skin with three ropes, whose thick and many knots wore their way into his flesh, and that he refused to permit the groom of the chambers to cleanse his garment of sackcloth, which in course of time became vermin-laden, saying that at every bite he remembered his sins.

The youth presented his papers, which the French prince had read to him. When he learned of the dire distress of his good city of Jinan, he vowed he would start that very day to its relief. But mass must be said before preparations were commenced. After mass the messenger might refresh himself with food

and sleep, while the army was getting in marching condition.

They started soon after midday, their intention being to camp a little distance from the enemy's strongly entrenched position, and at break of dawn to rush upon them, surprising them before they had awakened. When the besieged saw that succor had come, they would, no doubt, sally forth from the city gates, and the enemy being attacked front and rear, would soon be put to rout.

A heavy rain was falling, flooding the roads, but the prince insisted upon proceeding in spite of the slow progress they would be obliged to make. They were picking their way carefully, when a priest was seen ambling along toward them on a fat horse, probably on his way to administer the last sacrament to some dying person. As soon as Prince Charles perceived him he dismounted from his horse, and kneeling in the muddy road, besought his blessing. Neither was he satisfied till mass was then and there celebrated, for the pious prince travelled provided with everything that was necessary to perform the ceremony. Several times was the march thus interrupted, and at nightfall they were still far from their intended camping place.

They resumed the journey again the following morning, but owing to the peculiarities of the prince, it was rather late before they started, and it was night

of the second day of their march—the third since Raoul had left the city—before they arrived at their destination, a few miles from the enemy's camp. The Jinan youth was almost consumed with anxiety lest the people of the city should become hopeless and surrender before their arrival. His fears were not unfounded; for when the citizens of Jinan saw fall the darkness of the third night since the departure of their messenger, they believed his disguise had been penetrated, and that he had been imprisoned, even if no worse fate had befallen him.

The night passed in anxious watching. The rich bourgeois concealed their valuables in subterranean chambers, where the eye of a stranger would probably never penetrate; and the poor citizens hid their scanty belongings in all kinds of out-of-the-way places, hoping they would escape the enemy's search after spoils, while they shut themselves up in cellars or upper chambers, barred in by iron bolts. A watch was still maintained from the lookout tower, more from precaution than hope. The gray light of early dawn began to spread over the town, the garrison was preparing to vacate the citadel, the rich bourgeois were making ready to leave their homes, when there came a ringing shout from the walls. The people flocked to the high points of the city, and saw advancing toward them, on the other side of the enemy's camp, a large army of mounted men, upon whose

helmets, spears, and breastplates the rays of the sun were playing with dazzling brilliancy.

The call to arms was at once issued, and the town forces quickly assembled and formed; and when they saw that their allies had engaged the attention of the enemy, they sallied out from the city and attacked them in the rear.

The Montfort faction was completely routed, and the inhabitants of Jinan dined well for the first time in many days, for in their flight the besiegers had been obliged to abandon their camp without carrying away any of its stores.

The future of the Jinan youth was assured from that time. The grateful citizens of Jinan flocked about him, the poor people content if only they might kiss his hands or even feet. A purse of gold was given him by the magistrates, to which the bourgeois largely contributed, glad to be let off so cheaply. A valiant knight banneret, in the service of Count Charles of Blois, named Messire de Freytel, offered to take him into his household and to provide him with a handsome suit of mail and a spirited charger. The offer was gladly accepted, for the youth, though apparently of obscure birth, had formed the determination to win his golden spurs by his gallantry and courage. When asked his name, he modestly replied:

“ Théodor.”

And the people said he was well named; indeed had

he been the gift of God to them, for without God's help through him they would have been in purgatory that night rather than supping in their own city.

The advantage gained by the Count of Blois was hotly followed up for a while, the French prince taking many castles and towns claimed by the Count of Montfort. The Count of Blois had a large army, and he proposed going into the heart of the enemy's country, and, if possible, end the war, of which both sides had grown heartily tired, and would have come to some sort of compromise, if the wife of Charles of Blois, who was the real claimant, her husband fighting in her behalf, would have consented.

There was a town on the western coast of Brittany in possession of the Montfort faction that the Count of Blois desired to acquire, as its position commanded the surrounding country. But its natural defences, as well as a strong garrison, rendered it safe from assault; its rocky foundations prevented undermining, and its situation on the coast saved it from being starved into surrender, for the English could always furnish it with supplies. The only possible way to take it was by surprise through stratagem.

The Count of Blois had called a council of his most powerful knights to advise upon means to surprise the city. One proposed this, another that, but no plan was feasible. They all offered to seek an entrance into the town on some pretext, and then try to open

the gates to the count. But they were all too well known. They would be recognized by some one or another before they had time to effect their object. The mission required the wisdom of an experienced knight, yet the apparent youth and guilelessness of a boy.

At length Messire de Freytil spoke:

“ Monseigneur le prince and messires, let me say but a word. I have in my service a young squire of extraordinary adroitness and skill at arms; perhaps my lord prince and my lords knights will remember him when I say that it was he who rode out of the city of Jinan and brought the news of its extremity. I have seen much of him since, watched his actions; he has proved himself a valiant youth in every respect. Why not propose to him that he should try to open the gates of the city to us? If your highness wish, I will send for the youth that your highness may interrogate him.”

“ Let him be summoned,” said the prince.

Théodor was soon found and brought before the assembled lords. He stood respectfully aloof until bidden to approach.

Then said Messire de Freytil:

“ My lord prince has need of thy services if thou canst devise the means to enter a city unsuspected, afterward opening the gates to us that we may surprise the garrison and overpower it.”

“That were a difficultfeat, my lord.”

“The more hazardous the undertaking, the greater the glory if successfully accomplished.”

“What would my lord have me to do?”

“Enter the city, open its gates, as I have said.”

“But how, my lord?”

“Do it thy own way, but let it be done.”

“Will my lord prince grant me a little time to consider a plan?” asked the youth, turning toward the Count of Blois.

“Thou shalt have until this evening,” answered the prince, speaking for the first time. “On the fourth day from now we will be in the neighborhood of the town, to the south of it. At midnight we shall be before the walls, out of sight, however, of sentinels; at dawn we will be before one of its gates, which we will expect thee to open for us. If thou do this thing for us, thou shalt have both fief and knighthood.”

The youth's heart jumped in his breast. Here was the opportunity to win his golden spurs! It must be done. Receiving his dismissal, Théodor withdrew to consider the means to accomplish the task consigned him.

It was afternoon of the same day. Something of an unusual nature was going on in the quarters of the men-at-arms. Everybody was hurrying in that direction. Pressing forward, the late comers saw a crowd of soldiers, camp followers, and attendants suround-

ing a man of colossal proportions, who was entertaining the spectators with his feats of prodigious strength. He was standing with his back against a wall and calling out to the crowd to come on,—all of them, one at a time, or all together. A dozen or more of the brawniest soldiers made a rush for him, expecting to overpower him by their numbers, but so soon as they were within reach of that massive arm they were bowled over like a set of ninepins before a ball. When he had given the crowd enough of that sport, he lay down on his face on the ground and bade as many as would pile themselves on his back. Soon he was covered by a hillock of human beings. He drew in his legs and arms, raised his body with a sudden spring, and sent the men sprawling to the right and left. He performed many other feats: lifting heavy weights, bearing immense burdens on his chest or back, and throwing large objects at long distances. Then, when he was stopping a minute to think what next he should do, the strains of a lute were heard, accompanied by a rich voice. Then the strong man took a pouch that hung from his side and went among the spectators. They had been put in such a good humor by his entertainment that they gave freely, each according to his means.

The *jongleur* was by no means a small man, but he looked slight enough beside his brawny companion. His face was darkened with dye, and he wore a hood

that covered his head, so that none recognized in the *jongleur* the youth called Théodor.

That evening Prince Charles awaited the coming of Théodor in vain.

“He has no stomach for so hazardous an enterprise,” said the prince. “We must look elsewhere.”

Messire de Freytal was exceedingly vexed that his attendant should not have presented himself at the appointed time. He sent a messenger after him with an order that he come at once. It was some time before the messenger returned, saying that Maître Théodor could not be found, and that one of the knight’s attendants had seen him an hour or two before, and he had asked him to convey a message to their lord.

“And what was the message? Speak quickly!” said Messire de Freytal impatiently.

“To remember the place and time of meeting. That was all, my lord.”

“Think again. Was there nothing more?” asked the prince.

“He said nothing more, your highness, for I asked, except to say he was going on a journey.”

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE SWEET SINGER OF THE WEST AND JEAN LE FORT.

It was after sundown, and the city gates were closed for the night, and no one was permitted to enter or leave the town without giving his name and business. They were troublous times, and extra precautions were necessary to secure safety. It had been a toilsome journey, and the two travellers who asked admittance at the principal gate longed for a good supper, and a bed on which to repose their aching limbs. The larger of the two men hailed the warden in stentorian tones.

That functionary appeared in the little tower that topped the gate, and demanded the names and business of the would-be visitors.

This time it was the smaller of the two travellers who spoke:

“I am called the Sweet Singer of the West, and this man is the far-famed Jean le Fort, renowned for his feats of strength. We are come to entertain the good people of the town in our several ways.”

“*Ma foi*, you have come late. Do you know that it is easier to enter this city than to leave it?”

“Why may that be?”

“Because the enemy of our lord Duke of Brittany may at any time present himself with his army before our gates.”

“In faith, then, they’ll have an easy time of it, if it be so easy to enter thy gates.”

“*Mordieu*, no! It is only those who travel singly, or in groups of two or three, like yourselves, who may find it easy to enter within our gates. But we are on alert for spies. A short shrift would be given all such. But to make doubly sure, though we admit strangers, if such be their wish when they know our conditions, we take care that they do not leave us again except it be our will.”

“Maybe you will treat us so well we will have no desire to depart from you. If it be, however, that we please you not, you may be all too ready to give us our riddance.”

“If ye are not spies, ye need fear nothing.”

“Why should we be spies? We who travel about from town to castle and castle to town to get our sup, bite, and lodgment?” replied the one who called himself the Sweet Singer of the West, and who seemed to do the talking for both. “But speak, must we go farther and seek entertainment elsewhere, or will you open the gate to us who are way-worn and hungry?”

" You may enter; and if you be as you say, you will no doubt be welcome, for the people are in need of something to keep up heart in so dreary a time."

The gate was opened, and as the travellers entered, the spokesman asked their way to an hostelry. They had no difficulty in finding one near the southern gate of the city, where they were provided with a good supper and later with beds.

The next day the two strangers were the centre of an admiring crowd in the market-place. Their fame soon spread abroad throughout the whole city, and late that afternoon they were bidden to present themselves the following day at the palace of the governor of the city to amuse his guests, who were to be of the chief personages of the city.

In the meantime Théodor, or the Sweet Singer of the West, as he was then known, explored all the gates of the town, and examined their situation and construction. He learned that they were double-locked at sunset, and after nightfall the captain of the guard rode around on the inside of the walls and collected the keys, which remained in his possession during the night. If any one had occasion to leave the city after dark, he could only do so by applying to the captain of the guard, who could permit him to depart or not, as it seemed to him best. No one was allowed to enter the city after nine o'clock at night.

It seemed impossible to gain possession of one of

the keys, even for a time long enough to get an impression of it, for they were not permitted to go out of the possession of the wardens who had charge of them during the day. He could not overcome one of them by physical force, as too many were always passing within or without or by the gates. He tried to make friends with the different gate-keepers, and though all were friendly, he feared to try to tempt them to disloyalty, lest they prove incorruptible and would report his attempts to the captain of the guard. He could scarcely sleep that night thinking of it; so long before dawn he quietly arose and slipped out of the inn, and prowled again about the city gates. At dawn he saw the captain of the guard come out of the citadel. He followed him to the south gate. There the captain of the guard called to the sentry that was pacing the wall above, and asked him if all was well.

“All is well,” he answered; “and the porters await without.”

The captain of the guard unlocked a small gate beside the larger one, opened it, stood on one side while several peasants entered, each bearing on his back a sack of flour.

Théodor was fertile in expedients, and instantly he saw the way to open the gates to the forces of Charles of Blois, if information could but be conveyed to them. No doubt provisions were delivered this way every morning, for he heard the leading peasant

say, after he had deposited his sack within the walls:

“To-morrow, then, master?”

“Aye, to-morrow, and bring beans for the horses, for their provender is almost out.”

All day long Théodor pondered on the problem of how to communicate with Prince Charles or with Messire de Freytil. No doubt they were now in the vicinity, but kept their presence quiet, so as not to alarm the peasants in the neighborhood. That was not a difficult thing to do then, for the woods were thick, population sparse; and should any luckless peasant chance upon the knowledge of their presence, he would be quickly silenced.

Neither Théodor nor Jean le Fort could leave the city without giving a plausible reason, and they had actually no excuse, for they were well entertained, well paid for their songs and feats of strength, were engaged to appear before the governor that very day, and might be called upon again on the morrow by him or some other well-known person. Could Théodor leave the city in disguise, he might be able to accomplish it, but then how could he be sure of entering again in case he was needed within the walls? And, again, his disguise might be penetrated; in that case, there would be no longer any hope of effecting an entrance into the city, for the suspicions of its rulers would be aroused.

The afternoon came, and the time for their appearance before the governor. All the while he was sitting in the great hall, singing his songs, or telling his tales, or waiting for Jean le Fort to get through with his performance, Théodor was thinking how to elude the watchfulness of the guard and how to communicate with Count Charles of Blois. He was looking at his companion without really seeing him, and he was called back to himself by hearing the governor's voice. He listened to what he was saying:

"Pardie, but the fellow hath indeed prodigious power. Never have I laid eyes on his like."

"My lord speaks truly," responded one of the guests. "Perchance he could even lift the Lucky Stone."

"And what may that be?" inquired the governor.

"'Tis a stone that lies half a mile distant from the town, and is called the Lucky Stone, for say those who should know, that when that stone be brought back to the town by a single man unaided, this town shall be no longer between two foes; for, in truth, whatever lord hath possession of the town in times of strife, trade ceases and the prosperity of the people is gone. It is said that a long time since a giant who had a grudge against the town removed it thither, and it seems as if a giant must return it."

"In faith, show me the stone, my masters, and if

one man conveyed it hence, another shall bring it hither again."

Here was the opportunity that Théodor had wanted. He spoke:

"If my lord the governor will but permit my good Jean to attempt the feat, no harm will be done; and if he succeed, peace may indeed return to the city."*

"Pardie, we will see him make the attempt, at least," exclaimed the governor. "Let the hour be set for ten o'clock in the morning, and those present may accompany me who will."

There was a banquet after the entertainment, to which both Théodor and Jean were bidden, being given places way down at the lower end of the great board. While he was eating, Théodor was also thinking, so he paid but little attention to the jests and talk that went around the table. It seemed a long time before he was at liberty to seek his lodgings and to tell Jean of his plans and give him the instructions he was to follow implicitly.

As soon as they were in their room alone, Théodor unfolded his plan to Jean, who listened in silence, saying after he had finished:

"*Très bien*, maître, but what am I to do?"

"I will accompany thee. When thou hast engagéd the attention of the company by thy efforts to lift

* The war of the Brittany Succession was ended in less than four years from this time, the victory being with the Montfort party.

the stone, I will slip away, and thou must try to make my absence pass unnoticed. At dawn be at the small door beside the southern gate. When the door is opened I will enter with a sack upon my shoulder, which I will throw down upon the ground, then take my stand near where the sentinel shall pass on the wall above. When one of my companions shall throw down his sack so that the gate cannot be closed, then shalt thou overpower the captain of the guard. I will silence the sentinel; then before the guard is awakened, we will have taken the keys of the large gate from the captain of the guard, and open it to our friends, who at a signal from us will rush upon the town from the adjoining woods. Before the garrison have armed themselves, our army will be within the city, and in a brief time it will be in our possession."

"*Très bien, maitre, it shall be done.*"

The next morning, a little after ten o'clock, the governor of the castle, accompanied by Jean, and followed by two or three score of men, including Théodor, left the eastern gate. They were all on foot, for it was a short walk to their destination, the place where the Lucky Stone had lain undisturbed for many years, in spite of the efforts that had been made to lift it from time to time. Théodor had no difficulty in slipping away unobserved, the company being much occupied in watching the giant as he stooped over the stone and lifted it from its bed with so great an ease

that it seemed as if the stone had been awaiting his coming to return to its proper place. He bore it up the hill and put it in the spot that had been prepared for it, and the rest of the day was spent in celebrating so auspicious an event. No one seemed to miss Théodor except the keeper of the hostelry where they lodged, who, when he saw Jean return alone about bedtime, asked where the Sweet Singer was. Jean winked one eye, and replied vaguely that he was in good company, and would be heard from on the morrow early.

In the meantime Théodor had made his way some miles south of the city. Despite the large number of men camping in the woods, it was some hours before Théodor found the camp; for the forest was a dense one, and the men had been ordered to keep in hiding; no fires even were allowed, lest the smoke betray their presence.

He inquired his way to the tent of Messire de Freytile; and on seeing the knight, told him how he thought an entrance into the city might be effected. Messire de Freytile took him at once to Prince Charles. Fortunately for them, he was not at his devotions, so they were admitted at once to his presence. He also approved of Théodor's expedient when it was explained to him, and promised that the whole force should march at midnight and at dawn be in the woods near the town, and that Théodor should pick out his

own companions to aid him in the hazardous attempt to effect an entrance through the side gate as peasants bringing provender.

After all preliminaries had been satisfactorily arranged Prince Charles graciously advised the youth to retire and refresh himself with food and sleep, so as to be fresh for the night's work. Instead of departing, Théodor dropped on one knee at the feet of the prince, saying:

“O prince, one boon I crave of your highness should our enterprise succeed!”

“Have I not already promised thee a fief and knighthood if thou succeed? Dost thou require more for this service?”

“Not for myself, O prince; that were more than sufficient, more than my labors deserve; but I ask not for myself.”

“Speak then.”

“Should your highness be victorious to-morrow dawn, I beg that the good people of the town be not delivered to the sword nor their goods to pillage.”

“Why shouldst thou consider the people who are recalcitrant to me, their rightful lord?”

“In very truth, my lord prince, they but obey their masters. They will prove as loyal to your highness as to my lord Count of Montfort. 'Tis not they who dispute the claim of your highness, but they who rule over them.”

“Who is to pay my soldiers if not they who are insubordinate?”

“There is gold enough in the citadel. Spare the people, monseigneur, for the sake of the love the good God bears them.”

“Sayst thou that there is treasure in the citadel?”

“Yes, your highness. Some have I seen myself, other have I been told about.”

“If thou wilt lead the way to the citadel and help us to acquire the treasure thou sayst is therein, the people shall not be molested either in person or property.”

“A thousand thanks, monseigneur; I will do it.”

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE ATTACK ON THE CITY.

At dawn the following morning a beardless youth, wearing a peasant's dress of sheepskin and carrying a bag of provender on his back, hailed the sentinel that paced the wall near the southern gate of the city.

"And what want you?" gruffly asked the sentinel.

"We have the horse food ordered by the captain of the guard."

"Well, you'll have to wait till he comes, then, with the key to unlock the gate," responded the sentinel, turning his back on the supposed peasant and continuing his walk.

This was an unexpected difficulty. Théodor did not even know whether the captain of the guard was expecting supplies that morning. They might be kept waiting there till sunrise. Delay would probably mean defeat. He spoke again:

"We have business elsewhere. Perhaps the captain of the guard has forgotten or overslept himself. Could he not be summoned?"

"And who is to go for him, *cochon*? Is it I who should leave my post at the behest of such as ye?"

“Is there not one within who would do this kindness for us?”

“And who art thou that thy wish should be respected? Go to!” and again he resumed his walk.

Then those outside the walls heard the deep tones of Jean le Fort call out to the sentinel:

“And what may they want?”

“To deliver their goods inside the town.”

“And why not?”

“Because there is no one here to open the gate to them.”

“Who are they and what have they?”

“They are peasants, and say they have provender for the horses.”

“In faith, that is badly needed. I myself heard my lord governor complain but yesterday that the horses were looking ill-fed, and it was replied that food was scanty.”

“Well, if thou like thou canst report to the citadel that these fellows wait without.”

Jean lost no time in running to the citadel and asking for the captain of the guard. He was told that he still slept.

“Waken him, then,” replied Jean laconically.

“But he gave no orders for us to call him before his appointed time.”

“He may have forgotten. The food is without, and the peasants refuse to leave it, or to wait much

longer, as they say they have heard that the Count of Blois is marching this way with a large army, and they fear he will seize their grain."

One of the captain's attendants reluctantly consented to waken his master, and was sworn at for his interference with that gentleman's sleep.

"I am expecting no supplies, nor did I give thee orders to disturb me," and he turned over for another nap.

"But, messire le capitaine," persisted the attendant, "it is said that the Count of Blois is on his way hither; the horse food is low, and we may be invested before another twenty-four hours."

The captain of the guard continued to grumble, but he arose just the same, dressed himself, and went to the south gates, where the peasants were so impatiently awaiting him.

It was but a short walk. He unlocked the smaller gate, opened it, looked without at the peasants and their burdens, motioned them to enter, and then stepped aside to permit them to pass. Immediately behind him was Jean. The beardless peasant entered first, and he, too, placed himself behind the captain after he had deposited his sack on the ground. The others followed. The third peasant stumbled and almost fell; he dropped his load in the doorway quickly, as if to catch himself. The fourth let fall his sack on the other; the fifth and last followed the example of his

predecessor. At the same time the captain found himself seized from behind and held in a grip like iron, while simultaneously a stone from the sling-shot that the first peasant had concealed beneath his sack of food, laid the sentinel on the wall above senseless. The captain was bound and gagged, the keys taken from him, and the great gate opened to admit the Count of Blois and his army, which by this time were approaching the walls. The other sentinels in the vicinity having been attracted by what was going on, and seeing one of their companions suddenly fall not to rise again, sounded an alarm. They rushed to their comrade's aid, and closed the great gate to the mounted men that seemed to spring from out the woods. But in they crowded through the little door, that could not be shut on account of the sacks of grain that lay upon the sill; the sentinels, though fighting desperately, were soon overcome, and the big gate opened. The cries of the sentinels and the noise of the strife attracted to the spot some of the working people who were abroad early, and the guards in the citadel were awakened, but before they had time to appear upon the scene the whole army of the count was pouring into the city.

By this time Théodor and his comrades had thrown off their sheepskin mantles and boots, and appeared armed *cap-à-pie*. He led the way toward the citadel, and was followed by the count with a large number

of men. But fighting went on all over the city, for the citizens armed themselves as quickly as possible and flocked into the streets to protect their homes. By this time the garrison had sprung into their arms and were ready to repel the attack upon the citadel. But Théodor was familiar with the place, and led his followers in by a back entrance that was but poorly guarded, and in a short time the whole building was a scene of bloodshed.

It was a most desperate hand-to-hand encounter between the assailants and the garrison. Every landing, every staircase, every room into which the invaders could effect an entrance, was the scene of a sanguinary conflict; while in the great guard-room, where the garrison had slept, a regular battle was taking place. But the assailants were reinforced by seemingly unfailing numbers, and drove the garrison before them up higher and higher. It was a pandemonium of sound. The strokes of sword and battle-axe on steel armor, the shouts of the fighters, the groans and shrieks of the wounded, filled the place with clamor. Every step was fiercely contested. Théodor found himself in the very thickest of the fight. By degrees he was pushed into a smaller apartment; at his side was a stranger knight, whose device Théodor did not stop to notice. Jean, as usual, was near his master; the three were hemmed in by a number of the garrison. The stranger knight was

forced to his knees; but just as he was about to receive a death stroke, Théodor threw himself in front of him and protected him with his body. He fought off the assailant, but in an instant five or six others took his place, and the youth felt blows rain upon him from all sides. Then it seemed as if Jean le Fort became possessed with the maniacal fury of seven devils, and he rushed forward, swinging his battle-axe with such celerity and force that he actually mowed down the enemy before him. In a short time he was the only moving being in the room; all else were either dead or so sorely wounded that they could not raise themselves. Jean threw himself against the door and shut it, holding it fast with his great weight. After a while he could no longer hear the roar and din of battle, and he cautiously put out his head to take a look at the progress of affairs. The conflict was at an end. The garrison had seen it was powerless to try any longer to defend the citadel, and had surrendered. The fighting in the streets had also ceased, for the people made little resistance; it was useless in the face of such overwhelming numbers.

By this time the stranger knight had recovered from the faintness caused by loss of blood from his many wounds, and asked Jean who it was that had saved his life.

“ Faith, messire, he is called Théodor.”

“ And thou?”

"I am known as Jean le Fort."

"Thou art well named. Thou wilt hear from me later."

As soon as possible Théodor was carried to his lodgings. He had not yet recovered consciousness. A leech was summoned, who shook his head, and would not promise that the youth should live. Prince Charles made inquiries for Théodor so soon as the city was really in his possession, and was greatly grieved when he learned it was feared he would die.

"Rather would I have lost a dozen other men than he!" he exclaimed with a fine disregard of the feelings of the dozen other men.

For many days Théodor lay either in a stupor or in a raging delirium. In the meantime Prince Charles had departed from the city, leaving a large garrison to protect the town, without being able to bestow upon the plucky youth who had made possible the taking of the town the honor of knighthood, or the right to wear the golden spurs.

At length the fever subsided, and Théodor returned to consciousness, and those about him were cheered by the leech's favorable report, saying that now, barring accidents, there were no reasons why the youth should not recover in time. Jean had been his unwearied and faithful nurse, eating and sleeping by his side, all the weeks when his life seemed to hang by a thread.

One day the sick youth asked, feebly:

“Where is Messire de Freytile?”

“Messire de Freytile is with my lord count at Penthievre, where his highness is taking a rest after his long campaign.”

“Did he say nothing about me?”

“In sooth, he said many things. He came himself to see thee, and left this purse of gold for thy comfort.”

“My lord is very kind.”

“Monseigneur le prince has also sent to inquire after thee, and bade thee, as soon as able to travel, follow him to Penthievre, where he will dub thee knight.”

“He has not forgotten his promise, then,” murmured Théodor. Later he asked:

“And did the army spare the people?”

“In faith, yes, and spent their gold among them, till they blessed our coming. In truth it was a great treasure they had hidden in the citadel. There was something for every one.”

“Even for Jean le Fort?” asked Théodor, smiling.

“In verity, yes. See!” and he drew from his pouch a long purse full of shining gold pieces. “And this,” drawing out another, “is from the gentleman whose life thou didst save at the risk of thy own. He also left a message for thee to the effect that the Count de Rainault never forgets a service, and if thou wilt wait

upon him on thy recovery, he will requite thee handsomely for all the pain thou hast suffered on his account."

Had not Jean been so much engaged in restoring his gold to its place in his pouch, he would not have been so unprepared for the sharp blow he suddenly felt upon his head; he would have seen Théodor pick up the drinking cup and fire it point-blank at him, his eyes blazing with passion.

"What now, maître?" asked the faithful fellow in amazement, rubbing the place on his head where the drinking cup had struck.

"How darest thou bring me such a message from him who has ever been my enemy! Thou wouldest not have dared if I had not been ill!"

"Thy enemy?" repeated Jean. "When didst thou meet him?"

"Is it not he who has robbed me of my heritage, caused me to be put in prison; in short, is it not he who has been the author of all my misery? And to think that he should dare offer me his gold!" Théodor's voice was almost choked with excitement, while his eyes flashed and his cheeks flamed with anger.

"*Mordieu*, maître, who told me of this that I should know? I remember it was Rainault the name thou spakest, but I had forgotten. Tell me what shall be done with him and it shall happen."

"The so-called Count of Rainault is my enemy—



Almeric de Raguenel, whose soul I would see doomed to purgatory before I would raise my sword to save his life! So soon as I am well, I shall beg his highness Prince Charles to make me a knight that I may don my golden spurs, and challenge the *coquin* and make him bite the dust."

"If thou wouldst get well speedily thou hast best control thy anger, lest thou be thrown into a fever again and thy wounds break out afresh," returned Jean philosophically.

All the rest of that day Théodor fretted and fumed at his weakness that would not permit him to wreak his vengeance on his enemy. He never guessed it was his own father whose life he had saved.

The Count of Rainault had left the castle of Sir Griffith and joined the forces of Prince Charles in time to take part in the attack on the city they had surprised and captured through Théodor's agency. Neither did he imagine to whom he owed his life; that it was to his own son, whom he had been so anxiously, but fruitlessly, seeking.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE TRUE HISTORY OF RAOUL'S ESCAPE.

Raoul's and Iron Hand's masquerade as the Sweet Singer of the West and Jean le Fort has not for a moment deceived the reader. When Raoul managed his escape through the innocent connivance of Iron Hand, he shaved off his beard and mustache and dropped his name at the same time in order that he should not be recognized by any one travelling from Paris to Brittany.

When Iron Hand had returned from the expedition into a foreign country, whither he had been sent by the Duke of Orleans for the succor of one of his allies, he lost no time in asking for leave to visit Clermont in order to see Raoul, whose companionship he had sorely missed.

The duke received him kindly, praised the manner in which report said he had conducted himself, but told him he could not give him leave of absence till he had gone to Paris in answer to a summons that had been sent him from the High Court of Paris. Neither would that defer his seeing his comrade, for the youth

was in prison, and he was bidden to go to Paris to testify in his behalf. As he was going to Paris it would be as well for him to take his company of archers with him, as King John had requested the use of them for a short time. The order was given him after the chaplain had read it to him. How it was, no one could explain, but the bewildered peasant became confused by all the verbiage and legal formula in which the order was expressed, and got the idea in his head that he was to call at the fortress where Raoul was confined, the name being mentioned in the writ, take him hence, and escort him to Paris.

It was nightfall when Iron Hand and his company reached the fortress where Raoul was still imprisoned. In answer to the call with which the giant announced himself, the warden appeared in the tower over the massive iron-bound gate, and asked his business.

Iron Hand demanded entrance *par du roi*, at the same time flourishing the warrant above his head.

The warden ordered the small gate within the large one to be opened, and told Iron Hand that he could enter alone, but his company must remain outside. As the night was warm and the men were supplied with provision, Iron Hand made no demur at this condition.

The governor of the fortress was at dinner, and Iron Hand was bidden sit down and refresh himself. Nothing loath, the peasant giant deposited his huge form in

the seat designated at the lower end of the board, and proceeded to make a good meal.

The governor addressed several questions to him, which Iron Hand answered, incidentally speaking of his recent visit abroad. On hearing that he had been employed in foreign service, the governor bade him take a seat nearer to him, and a place being made for him toward the top of the board, Iron Hand took it. The governor asked him many questions concerning the state of affairs in the country from which he had just returned, as men were eager for news in those days, and they sat long at table, and drank correspondingly; all but Iron Hand, who, in spite of his great physique, was moderate in all things save in love for Raoul. He was accustomed to obey orders, and though he desired above all things to see again his young master, he waited until the governor had satisfied himself and asked no more questions. Then he requested to see the prisoner.

The governor demanded his order.

Iron Hand displayed the summons in all good faith, really believing it was an order for Raoul's removal to Paris. The governor was no better scholar than the peasant, and bade the chaplain read the warrant. Chaplains were as fond of good living as any other men in those days, perhaps even more fond, for they did not have the stir and excitement of warlike enterprises, and found their excitement in the exhilaration

that strong drink produces. His brain was not a little befuddled, and when he tried to make out the letters, they danced so before his eyes and took such queer shapes that he could not decipher them. He did not wish to acknowledge that he could not read the warrant, for he feared the governor's hasty temper; but having a ready memory and a quick wit in spite of his weakness for wine, he managed, by dint of remembering what Iron Hand had said, and making out a part of the words, to give a tolerably coherent rendering of the writ according to Iron Hand's idea of it. Thus fortune favors the brave, and ignorance sometimes wins when astuteness fails.

The governor had no suspicion that all was not right. He knew the youth had no powerful friends to intervene in his behalf, and as Iron Hand had arrived with an armed force and a legal summons, he had no doubt whatever of the correctness of the proceeding. It was only after the Count of Rainault had appeared with an order to see the prisoner, and he had looked again at the summons, having it read to him, that he realized his mistake. Then he threw himself upon the clemency of his majesty and was cast into prison.

Iron Hand did not want to give up the writ, as it had opened the prison doors that had closed upon his master. But the governor insisted, saying he could not remove the prisoner unless he left the order.

All this time Raoul was unconscious of the fact that his lowly friend was so near to him.

Weary indeed had he become of his long confinement, his only companionship the rats, with whom he had made friends, and who would always respond to the shrill whistle that he produced between his closed teeth, for they knew that a feast of bread crumbs awaited them. He was sleeping when the guard came to unlock his door, for Iron Hand was going to take him away that night, as he wished to be on the way to Paris before dawn.

The keeper briefly bade him prepare for a journey. Raoul obeyed without a word, not knowing what turn his fortunes had taken. When he was conducted into the governor's cabinet and saw Iron Hand, his heart beat fast with joy. At last he was to be free!

The governor told him he had been summoned to Paris, and he was to proceed thither that night, as it was thought better he should be in Paris by the time court opened.

The summons lay on the table near a lamp, where the chaplain had laid it down. Though reading was not a part of a gentleman's education in those days, Raoul had learned to read from his mother's chaplain, who had been a faithful friend and adviser to the châtelaine and her son. He saw at a glance that it was a summons for Iron Hand to appear before the court to give testimony concerning him, and had nothing

to do with him further than that. But he gave no hint of his discovery. He had been falsely charged and unjustly imprisoned, and he would take his freedom as he could get it. He saw that the writ really called for a peasant in the service of the Duke of Orleans, known as Iron Hand, to testify concerning a youth named Raoul and called *le Dieu-donné*, who had lived with the Sieur de Clermont, and was now confined in the fortress Blanc, some miles south of the capital. He greeted Iron Hand with little demonstration, much to his friend's disappointment. He was eager to get away from the fortress lest the mistake be discovered, and was not relieved of his suspense until the gates closed behind him and he was on a fleet horse miles away from his recent prison. Then he told Iron Hand of his mistake, and also that he did not intend giving himself up to the authorities, but to make his way to Brittany as quickly as possible, so as to elude pursuit and arrest.

Iron Hand was greatly troubled. Had he not been commanded by the royal summons to bring Raoul to Paris, and did not Raoul now refuse to accompany him? He could not be made to see his mistake; all he knew was that his young master swore he would not return to the capital, and begged him to go with him. 'Twas his duty to obey his lord Duke of Orleans and his majesty King John, but it was more necessary that he should do as bidden by the only

one who had shown him a tender affection. Well, it was not for a simple peasant to decide. What Maître Raoul said was to be done, must be done; therefore, he rode on to Paris with Raoul, reaching the capital at dawn, reported to the commander in whose service he was to place his company, and then with Raoul rode as quickly as possible toward Brittany. The gold Iron Hand had gained by his foreign service paid for their lodging and food, and bought them each a suit of clothes such as worn by the bourgeois class. They had gone to Jinan, and there lived in retirement until that morning when Raoul had pleaded the people's cause so eloquently. They had called themselves Théodor and Jean, and as no one in Brittany outside of Esticourt had heard of Iron Hand, they had little difficulty in concealing their identity.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE ATTEMPTED ABDUCTION.

Almeric's wounds were long in healing. He was treated with every consideration by the household of the Sieur de Clermont, although the lord of the castle rather avoided him. He laid it to Almeric's account that his daughter had run away from her father's house. If it had not been for him there would have been no difference of opinion between them. If the Sieur de Clermont had consulted his daughter's desire in the matter he would not have promised her hand to one to whom she could never give her heart; but he did not think of that. When news came that she was safe with her cousin in Brittany he was very much relieved, and would gladly have forgiven his daughter at once if he had not considered he had his dignity to uphold, and if he showed too great a willingness to overlook her disobedience he could never expect to receive a daughter's obedience again.

The Sieur de Clermont informed Almeric of the fact that Lady Ysobel was with Sir Griffith in Brittany, and then made no further mention of her save occasionally to Dame Marie-Anne, who would not be

silenced when she wished to speak of her beloved nursling.

As soon as Almeric had sufficiently recovered to sit a horse, he set out, attended by two squires, for Château d'Esticourt. He was still smarting under the mortification caused by the humiliating treatment of his suit by the Lady Ysobel, and he had registered internally a vow that she should expiate her conduct toward him before he had finished with her. He had decided how he would act while he lay upon his couch waiting for his wounds to heal. His plan was to follow her to Esticourt, ingratiate himself with her by his respectful admiration; or, failing that, would forcibly abduct her, carrying her to one of his father's uninhabited châteaux, and there leave her, refusing to marry her, once he had her in his possession. She might weep, plead, and entreat, but he would answer her with gibe and sneer, and bid her remember that Almeric de Ragueneel was not one whom she could treat with aversion without ruining the hour she met him.

He was received with cool surprise when he presented himself at the Château d'Esticourt, for no one had suspected he would visit the château of one whom he had insulted, and where lived a bride who had, as it were, spurned him. He did not appear to observe any lack of warmth in his reception, but established himself in the household much on the same footing

as when he lived there as squire of the châtelain before he had entered the service of King John.

Sir Griffith soon forgave the young man's fit of ill-temper; he could afford to be magnanimous so long as he had been victor in the combat, and soon began treating him with his former favor. The Lady Blanche preserved a more distant demeanor toward him, keeping Ysobel out of his way. Ysobel asked to be sent back to her father's house, but Lady Blanche told her the young knight would be soon leaving them to join in the Brittany war, as Sir Griffith had declared his intention of doing shortly. No doubt they would go together.

Almeric tried in every way to meet Ysobel, but she persistently avoided him. At meals she sat beside Lady Blanche, while Almeric was put on the other side of the board. If a hawking party was arranged and Lady Ysobel found that Almeric intended going, she would remain at home. If, on the contrary, he declared his purpose of remaining within, she was sure to express a desire to be of the party. No way he managed could he get a word with her save in the presence of the household.

One day Lady Blanche, with Ysobel by her side, was sitting in her boudoir surrounded by her maidens, all engaged with needle-work, when there arrived at the castle a *jongleur*, who asked to be allowed to entertain the lord and lady and their guests and household

with his tales. He was heartily welcomed, and after being refreshed with food and drink was invited to the lady's boudoir to recite his tales. Lady Blanche also gave permission to any of the household who might wish to hear him, to be present.

The *jongleur* was a man past middle age, with long white hair, ruddy cheeks, and bright black eyes. His voice was particularly pleasing and his manner engaging, and his dramatic delivery and gesture seemed to bring the scene he described before the eyes of his listeners.

After he had seated himself near the lady of the castle, she said to him:

“ I pray thee, good sir, tell us something of what is going on without, not any of the old tales we have heard so oft repeated.”

“ Shall I tell my lady of that which has been happening in Brittany within the last few months? ”

“ Yes, let us hear of the doings of our neighbors, instead of the acts of dead and gone heroes.”

The *jongleur* had been travelling throughout Brittany recently, and had heard much about the exploits of the Sweet Singer of the West and his companion, Jean le Fort, and he proceeded to tell about the two cities and what had happened to them, and the part taken by Théodor, whose name and fame had spread throughout the length and breadth of Brittany. Of Jean le Fort he said comparatively little, or else the

suspicions of the lord and lady of Esticourt and of Lady Ysobel would have been aroused that he could be no other than Iron Hand, for they would not have believed that two such men could exist in the same country and at the same time.

He pictured the beauty, strength, gallantry, and exploits of the youth in the most vivid colors, and also told how he was to be rewarded with fief and knighthood so soon as he was able to ride to Penthievre, where Count Charles of Blois was then holding court.

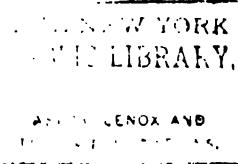
As Ysobel listened her eyes sparkled and her cheeks flushed. Raoul would have been just such a youth, she was sure, if he had lived and had had the opportunity so to distinguish himself. Then her eyes grew dim, and a lump filled her throat and almost choked her as she thought of his untimely end.

Almeric was another interested listener. He chafed at the thought of another winning such renown while he lay ill of his wound, received because of a slight put upon him by a girl. He resolved to don his armor the very next day and start for the scene of conflict. On second thought, however, he concluded to wait until he had paid off old scores with Lady Ysobel. He would postpone his expedition two days longer.

The *jongleur* was hospitably entertained and generously rewarded, and gladly promised a speedy return to beguile the inhabitants of the château with his tales and songs.



THE "JONGLEUR" TELLING THE STORY.



Ysobel had renewed her friendship with the old seneschal, who, however, had not quite forgiven the theft of his keys on the night that Iron Hand had opened the door of the banqueting room. She often walked with him about the castle walls, feeling secure in his company against any unwelcome attention from Almeric. But the afternoon after the visit of the *jongleur*, as they were slowly walking about on the broad walls that gave such a beautiful view of the surrounding country, with the wind-swept moors and pine forests on one side and the sparkling ocean on the other, the seneschal was suddenly called away. As he expected to return in a few moments, Ysobel waited for him. As she stood there alone, looking over the broad waters, she thought of the *jongleur's* tale, and did not notice the flight of time. Then her thoughts reverted to Raoul, and to the night that the boat in which she sailed from La Rochelle had gone to pieces on the rocks below. She retraced, event by event, the history of her sojourn in the château two years before, her illness, her homesickness, and that morning when she sat in that very place and felt she should never again see father or home, and Raoul had come to her and promised to restore her to her father's arms. It was just such a day as this: the air was bright and cool and fresh, the sun shone, the blue waters sparkled—oh! where was he now?

She heard a step behind her. Her heart throbbed

faster; she turned, half expecting to see the face and form of Raoul approaching toward her. Instead it was Almeric, who was coming toward her rapidly. She walked quickly in the opposite direction, but he soon overtook her.

“Why dost thou shun me?” he asked gently.

“Because I want none of thy company, messire,” she responded coldly.

“It is not I who have treated thee ill.” There was a slight emphasis on the “thee.”

“Thou art treating me ill when thou forcest thy presence upon me,” she said, looking at him with contempt gleaming from her dark eyes.

It was her very defiance and avoidance that rendered her doubly attractive in the eyes of her admirer. Men prize that which they have to strive for to obtain.

“Why should I be distasteful to thee? Surely my fortune and rank are equal to thine; am I not comely in appearance, and has not my fame as a gallant gentleman gone abroad?”

“Thou knowest too well wherein thou excel to require answer,” she replied scornfully.

“But why dost thou hate me?”

“Because thou art false! Thou hast pretended to be a friend to Raoul while thou art his enemy and rejoice in all the ill that has come to him!” she replied indignantly, her eyes flashing with anger. Never had she looked more beautiful than when she stood

thus confronting Almeric with flashing eyes and flaming cheeks.

“Ah!” There was a world of insolence in that single syllable as Almeric said it. “The peasant churl has dared make love to thee, and thy heart has responded. Happy indeed am I not to have wed a maiden who has been willing to be beloved by a varlet,” he sneered.

“He is a gallant gentleman, of better birth, a braver man, than thou, and a truer friend! Thou art naught but a coward to force thy company on one weaker than thyself! If I were a man——” she did not finish her sentence in words, but her clinched hands and defiant expression told what she meant.

“Thou shalt pay dearly for this, even if thou be a woman!” he hissed between his teeth, coming closer to her and seizing her by the arm.

She shrank from him, not in fear, but in aversion to his touch.

“The time will come when thou shalt on bended knee beg me to forget these words in vain!” he continued.

“Never!” she exclaimed; then she broke away from him and ran down the steps to the courtyard and up to her own room.

At the morning meal next day Sir Griffith said he was going hawking, and any who might wish to attend him must be in readiness to start in two hours.



Almeric said his horse had gone lame the day before and he did not care to ride another, so that he would not be of the party. Therefore two hours later Ysobel appeared in hunting array, with her falcon on her wrist, waiting to mount her horse. They had fine sport that day; the birds sighted by the hawks were many, and led them a fine chase. Ysobel, however, kept close to her cousin, for of late she had grown fearful, especially so since Almeric had threatened her the day before. In spite of her caution, she suddenly found herself between two horsemen, each of which seized a bridle rein, and a minute later she was led away from the rest of the party. She screamed. Both Sir Griffith and Lady Blanche heard her cry, but thought she was encouraging her bird, and seeing her attended by two squires, as they thought, made no attempt to follow her.

Ysobel was almost paralyzed with fright. Recognizing Almeric, his words of the day before flashed upon her memory. She looked back; already the rest of the company were far away. She screamed again; but Almeric bade her keep silence, or it would be so much the worse for her. She did not heed him, but cried again; her cries were borne away by the wind. She tried to throw herself from her galloping horse, but Almeric dropped her bridle rein and seized her about the waist and held her firmly. She became almost frantic with fear, for she knew not what fate awaited her!

CHAPTER XXXVI.

RAOUL RECEIVES HIS GOLDEN SPURS.

Raoul's wounds had been very severe, almost fatal. They were long in healing; and loss of blood, fever, and pain had sadly reduced his strength. His convalescence was slow and tedious. He chafed at the restraint put upon his movements, for the leech ordered that he should scarcely move lest his wounds begin to bleed afresh. Iron Hand faithfully carried out all instructions; the servant had for the time become master. One day Raoul vowed that he would mount a horse and start for Penthièvre the very next morning, or at latest the following day.

“ Try it, *mon maître*, and Iron Hand will put thee upon his back and carry thee to Paris, where the judges will put thee in prison again.”

“ Wouldst thou betray me into the hands of my enemies, Iron Hand? ” asked Raoul reproachfully.

“ Thou art thy worst enemy at present. Iron Hand would do anything to keep thee alive, even to taking thee to Paris, where they would keep thee quiet in spite of thyself.”

“ Better death than that! ” exclaimed Raoul, shud-

dering as he remembered first the dark dungeon in the Louvre, and afterward the solitary confinement for those weary weeks in the fortress prison on the outskirts of Paris.

"There is no need of either if thou wilt have a little patience," replied the loyal peasant, whose whole heart's love was given to his friend and master.

At length the day came when the leech pronounced it safe for Raoul to attempt the journey to Penthievre by easy stages. His appearance was greatly altered. He was no longer the strong, bearded youth who had appeared before King John and claimed to be the eighteen-year-old son of the Count de Rainault. Instead he looked little older than his years, for his sickness had reduced him in flesh and whitened his skin, while his mustache and beard had been shaved off since his escape from prison. Had he seen him now, King John might not have been so sure that the youth's tale was a false one.

It took him two days to reach Penthievre. Count Charles received him with great cordiality, and caused him to be sumptuously lodged so that he might recover from the effects of his journey. Those who saw him marvelled that so fair and slight a youth should have accomplished so much.

The ceremony of investing him with the honor of knighthood was to take place on the following day, for the Count of Rainault chanced to be absent on a

hunt, and he had expressed the desire to be present at the ceremony.

The state apartment was hung with draperies of cloth of gold and silver, velvet and damask, and mirrors of polished metal. There were little other furnishings, except the chair of state, placed on a dais at the upper end of the apartment. The room was filled when Raoul appeared, after having performed all the preliminaries on the eve of his investiture of knighthood. He had passed the night in prayer, afterward had bathed, been clad in garments of pure white to denote purification of both body and heart; for to Raoul it was a solemn ceremony, one in which he was to consecrate his sword to the service of the church and to the defence of the oppressed, like the knights-templars of old. First he did homage for the fief bestowed upon him by Charles of Blois by placing his hands within those of the prince and taking the oath of fealty to him; this was necessary, for no one could possess the honor of knighthood who did not have land, unless he were of noble birth, and Raoul's origin was thought to be obscure. Afterwards he was dubbed knight by Prince Charles, who tapped him on the shoulder by his sword-point; was given his sword; the spurs were attached to his boots, and Raoul was at last a knight, not by virtue of his birth and advantages, but because he had won the distinction **by** his own gallantry.

The Count of Rainault had stood far enough away from Raoul not to see his features distinctly; he was waiting to speak to him and to thank him for the service he had rendered him. But as soon as the ceremony was finished, and Raoul stood forth a knight, he asked to see the so-called Count of Rainault, who had desired his presence.

“Here am I,” said the count, stepping forward and holding out his hand to Raoul, who was astonished enough to see a middle-aged man instead of Almeric. He stared at his father in silence for a few seconds; put his hands to his eyes as if to wipe away a mist, and looked again, and then with a wild cry of “My father!” sunk to the floor unconscious.

“Raoul, my son, my son!” shrieked the Count of Rainault, for the recognition of father and son had been almost simultaneous.

The lords quickly gathered about the unconscious youth and his almost distracted father, who was on his knees beside Raoul, opening his tunic at the throat to give him air. As he did so, he caught sight of the amulet Raoul still wore about his throat, and unclasping it from his neck with trembling fingers, examined it and then exclaimed:

“*Que Dieu soit beni!* It is indeed he, for this amulet I saw with mine own eyes put about his neck by his mother when he was yet a babe.”

Raoul soon recovered consciousness, and was car-

ried to his room, where he was followed by his father, who would not now permit him to be out of his sight. As soon as he was strong enough he told his father all that had happened to him since they had parted before the battle of Poitiers. As he related the story of the night his mother had been killed, the count arose and hastily paced the floor, so great was his agitation; he listened with clinched teeth and drawn brows, and muttered imprecations mingled with his tears. But when Raoul had finished, he thanked God that at least his dear son had been spared him. Then Raoul told of what had taken place since, and of Iron Hand and his faithfulness.

“He shall be made rich,” exclaimed the count, “and ever remain about thy person.”

Raoul spoke of Sir Griffith’s goodness, and of how kindly the Sieur de Clermont had treated him.

“They who have befriended my son shall ever be my good friends,” interpolated the count, “and shall have a father’s prayers.”

Then Raoul also told of Almeric; and his father would scarce believe that the youth would have acted thus, he had so fair a seeming. He approved of his son’s conduct toward his enemy, especially in the light of recent events, of which Raoul as yet knew nothing. When he had finished telling all—the recovery of his memory, his subsequent imprisonment, his escape, and his exploits in Brittany—the

father showed his pride in his son's doings plainly, saying:

“Thou hast passed through many difficulties, but they fitted thee for the work thou hadst to perform, and thou hast acted as became one of thy name and house.”

“But tell me, my father, how you have escaped death, when all thought you were no more.”

It was the count's turn to relate his history, and when it was finished he asked to see Iron Hand.

It was the peasant who asked after the Sieur de Clermont and Lady Ysobel, after he had been complimented and praised by the father of his young master for his loyalty and devotion.

“The Sieur de Clermont is in his usual health, or was a short time ago; the Lady Ysobel is at present in Brittany with her cousin, Lady Blanche,” replied the count.

“In Brittany!” exclaimed Raoul. “Then shall I soon see her!”

It was not till the next morning that the count told Raoul how near the Lady Ysobel had come to be married to Almeric. When he heard all the details he wished to set out immediately for Esticourt; but his father persuaded him to wait, at least until the following morning, when, by starting early, they could reach the castle in the afternoon.

The following morning, soon after dawn, the count,

Raoul, and Iron Hand set out for Esticourt. That same afternoon they came within sight of the pennant flying from the highest tower of the castle.

As they were riding along rather slowly, Raoul and his father ahead, Iron Hand following a little distance behind, they suddenly heard a woman's screams. They stopped, looked in front, to the right, and to the left, but could see no one but themselves.

Again a piercing cry was heard:

"Au secours! To the rescue! Help!"

The cries seemed to proceed from a woods a little to the left of them. The three horsemen put spurs to their horses, and were soon on the spot whence the cries came. As they pushed aside the low overhanging branches two horsemen dashed past them a short distance below, but for the time they scarcely heeded them, for in front of them was the Lady Ysobel, almost falling from her horse in the faintness of terror.

"Ysobel!"

"Raoul!"

In an instant Raoul was off his horse and had the form of the fainting girl in his arms, while his father and Iron Hand went in pursuit of her abductors.

As Raoul looked into the white face of the apparently lifeless girl he thought she was dead. He had had no experience with fainting women; but he knew when a person died the heart stopped beating; so, to

make sure, he put his fingers to her round white throat, and when he felt a faint throb there, a slight hope replaced his deadly fear. He put his cheek down to her lips, and felt a breath that was but the shadow of a breath. He knew then that she was not dead, but did not know what moment might be her last. He had not the slightest idea what to do, and knelt there with her in his arms, praying to the saints to come to his aid. Presently he noticed a slight quivering of her eyelids; her bosom heaved, she breathed deeper, sighed, and opened her eyes. As her gaze met the anxious, impassioned look of Raoul a faint tinge of color came into her cheeks. She spoke. He put his cheek to her lips to catch her words.

“And art thou Raoul or his spirit?”

“Pardie, there’s little spirit in me. ’Tis all flesh and bone,” answered Raoul, longing to kiss the pale sweet face, yet not daring to.

“But we all thought thou wert dead.”

“No, alive; and come into his own, and come back to thee to see if thou hadst forgotten me,” he answered. Then he said: “I thought thou wert dead but a moment ago. What has brought thee here, and why shouldst thou have fainted?”

She shuddered, and an expression of terror came into her eyes.

“Where is he?” she asked, fearfully glancing about her.

“Where is who?”

“Almeric de Ragueneil.”

“Was it that villain who was with thee?”

“Yes. Where is he? Hast thou killed him?”

“No; but had I seen him I would have. I saw naught but thy face, and thought of nothing besides. But how was it that thou shouldst have been with him?” he asked half angrily, for a jealous fear had suddenly assailed him.

“He and his squire seized me while we were hunting, and were taking me I know not whither.”

“*Mordieu!* and I let him escape!” Raoul leaped to his feet, as if he would mount his horse and be after him at once.

“Raoul, Raoul,” cried Ysobel, also regaining her feet, “do not leave me!”

“No, no, dear one, never will I leave thee, unless thou bid me go,” and his arm stole around her waist.

“My father and Iron Hand have no doubt gone after him, and will bring him back to the castle. Canst thou ride, or shall I carry thee before me on my horse?”

“I can ride so long as thou art near to protect me,” she answered, looking at him with an expression of loving confidence.

They rode slowly on to the castle, and found the inmates in a state of great consternation. Ysobel’s absence had not been discovered until the close of the

hunt, and then they could not imagine what had happened to her. Men had been sent out in all directions to look for her, including Sir Griffith and the seneschal.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE RETURN TO PARIS.

Great were her surprise and joy when Lady Blanche saw that it was Raoul who had brought back Ysobel. Serviteurs were at once despatched to hunt up Sir Griffith, who was soon found; and then Ysobel must first give an account of herself, after which Raoul was asked innumerable questions concerning himself. Astonished indeed were the inhabitants of Esticourt when they learned that Raoul was the Sweet Singer of the West, who had gained such an enviable reputation for gallantry.

When Sir Griffith heard that Almeric had attempted to run away with his guest and cousin, he was terribly angry, and would have set forth at once to overtake him, but Raoul told him that his father and Iron Hand had already followed the abductor.

“Thy father?” repeated Sir Griffith.

“Yes, the Count of Rainault; he is indeed my father, and he himself has seen me and acknowledged me.”

It was a day of surprises. Even Almeric’s offence and escape were for the moment forgotten.

Then Raoul must tell them all that had happened to him since his arrest; and by the time he had finished, the Count of Rainault and Iron Hand had arrived at the castle, but without Almeric.

The next morning it was found that the excitement of the past few days, or over-exertion, had caused Raoul's wound to break out afresh. At first he was deeply vexed, for he had expected to go with Sir Griffith in search of Almeric. He longed to meet him; he felt he could not enjoy the thought of his new honor until he had effaced with blood the memory of the insults put upon him by the Brittany knight. The search was fruitless, however; Almeric seemed to have disappeared, none of his own people even knowing where he was.

On the whole, Raoul enjoyed this last illness; he was the object of tender attentions from the ladies Blanche and Ysobel, who gave up their time to his comfort and amusement. As soon as he was able to be moved, Iron Hand brought him down into the court, or carried him up on the sunny wall, or outside on the green terrace that overlooked the great blue sea. He talked with Ysobel of their first sojourn in the castle, recalling all the incidents of their life there. The first walk he took outside the walls was down to the beach where she had been brought ashore by Iron Hand; and altogether he had a very happy time.

They remained at Château d'Esticourt until Raoul

had recovered his strength, which he seemed quickly to do in the fresh, bracing air and in the society of those he loved and who loved him.

It was arranged that the Count of Rainault should take Raoul to Paris to see King John, in order that the youth might be purged of contempt of court by his escape from prison, and also to be exonerated from the charge of preferring a false claim to the county of Rainault. Sir Griffith and Lady Blanche, with a suitable escort, were to take Ysobel back to her father's house, and try and get his consent to her marriage with Raoul, which they did not think he would withhold, for it would be in every respect an advantageous marriage for his daughter. Lady Blanche proposed that instead of proceeding directly to Clermont, they also should go to Paris, witness Raoul's vindication, and then all go together to Clermont, and have the wedding celebrated before their return to Brittany. This plan was warmly seconded by Raoul, and not being objected to by any one, was followed.

They arrived in Paris late one afternoon, and went directly to the lodgings that had been prepared for them by attendants sent on in advance for that purpose. The next morning, just before noon, the Count of Rainault went to the Louvre, and asked for an audience with his majesty. He had the *entrée* on account of his rank, but as he wished a private interview,

he sent in his request. It was readily granted; and the count told his majesty all that had happened since he had last departed from the capital. King John was greatly interested, and especially with the account given of Raoul's exploits, though he was by no means convinced that he was what he represented himself to be; he thought the count had allowed himself to be too easily satisfied with the slender proof offered.

King John made no objection to pardoning Raoul for his escape from prison, but refused publicly to recognize him as the heir to Rainault until he had made inquiries into the affair. He bade the count bring Raoul and Iron Hand to him an hour later, when he would interrogate them.

When King John saw Raoul without his beard and mustache, which had not been allowed to grow, he could hardly believe it was the same youth who had appeared before him nearly a year ago and claimed to be the son of the count. He inquired concerning himself, and then dismissed him for a time, while he saw Iron Hand alone.

Iron Hand, who had been awaiting his turn without, had not expected to face royalty alone, and was rather frightened at the prospect.

“And what is it I should do to his majesty?” he asked.

“Nothing, save to salute him as thou wouldest thy

lord, and answer such questions he may ask of thee as best thou canst, according to thy information."

"Faith, and I can do that much."

So when he was taken into the presence of the king he bowed low before him, and then stood erect and silent, waiting to be questioned, looking neither to the right nor left, but keeping his eyes fixed on the king.

His majesty could not but be impressed with the splendid physique of Iron Hand, his clear gaze, and honest look; he seemed every inch a soldier, one who had been bred to the profession of arms, rather than a peasant who a few years before had never mingled with any of higher condition than himself.

King John questioned him closely concerning the time he had first seen Raoul and their subsequent life. He could not but be impressed favorably with his straightforward replies.

When he asked him how long ago it was since the attack on the château, Iron Hand was obliged to consider for a time before answering. Figures were not his strong point.

"*Voyons*," he said; "there was the winter in the cave—that's one," checking it off on the first finger of his left hand; "then the winter in Brittany—that's another," checking off his second finger; "there's the winter at Clermont," checking off a third finger; "then the winter in the service of the my lord Duke of Orleans," checking off the fourth finger; "and that

just passed" ; this time he used his massive thumb as a means of computation, and then spread out four immense fingers and a thumb for his majesty's inspection.

"Going on five years," said his majesty thoughtfully. "And how old was he when you first saw him?"

"Don't know, my lord your majesty," he replied, being a little confused as to the proper manner in which to address royalty, and trying to make sure. "Between a boy and a youth; about the size of one of my lord majesty's pages."

"And how did he look when thou first saw him?"

"Like a saint, my lord!"

"*Mordieu*, and how may that seem, for never did I see one?"

"Neither have I, my lord, save in my dreams, and then they always looked like my master."

"And hast thou been with him at all times save when thou went abroad in the service of the Duke of Orleans?"

"Yes, my lord your majesty, and if I had not been away, my master would never have been put into prison."

"And how might that have been prevented?"

"Not sure how, your majesty; but Iron Hand would never permit harm to come to Maître Raoul so long as he was near."

The king was touched by the man's devotion and also amused, and questioned him further.

"Didst thou not know that thou wert treasonably employed when thou ran off with this Raoul?"

"I obeyed orders, my lord."

"Whose orders?"

"First the order on the parchment, then Maître Raoul's."

"But did not Maître Raoul, as thou callst him, tell thee that the order was for thy appearance in Paris, and not for his?"

"Yes, my lord your majesty, after I had taken him from the prison, but I obeyed the order first."

"Then when thou didst find thy mistake, why didst thou not appear before the judges and tell them of thy mistake?"

"Because Maître Raoul bid me ride with him to Brittany."

"Suppose I told thee to do one thing and thy Maître Raoul to do another, which wouldest thou do?"

"Both, my lord."

"But suppose you could not do both; for I should bid thee do something that thy master did not want thee to do?"

Iron Hand forgot the respect due to royalty and scratched his head.

"I always do as Maître Raoul bids me," he said, after a pause.

“Wouldst thou disobey thy king?”

Here was another puzzling proposition. To disobey Raoul he felt to be impossible, yet no loyal subject would disobey his king. He thought for a while, then a light spread over his face, and he looked the king again in the eyes as he answered:

“I must ever do as my master says, but he would do nothing, nor bid me do anything, contrary to your majesty’s will, just as your majesty would do nothing contrary to the wishes of the good God!”

“Thou hast great faith in both thy lord and king,” said King John, but he forbore questioning him further. “I would that I had many as faithful as thou.”

With these words King John dismissed him, and again sent for Raoul.

On Raoul’s second appearance, King John asked him how it was that Messire de Ragueneel should have a brooch bearing the same characters as his ring. Raoul told him of his visit to the *sorcière*, and how he had given her that very brooch in order to make her speak. “Messire de Ragueneel has bought it of her. Perhaps,” he added, a sudden light being thrown on the situation, “it was he who fastened me in the cave where I spent two nights, in order that Sir Griffith might depart for Bordeaux without me, and that Almeric might take my horse Charlemagne, which he had always coveted.”

This remark led King John to inquire into Raoul's relations with Almeric, and brought out the fact that Almeric had tried to run off with the daughter of the Sieur de Clermont.

Suddenly King John put to his lips a silver whistle, on which he blew a shrill, sweet call. To the attendant that answered the summons, he said:

“Ask Messire de Raguенel to come hither.”

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE COMBAT.

When Almeric entered the king's cabinet he was unprepared to see Raoul, of whom he had heard nothing since his disappearance from the fortress. He concealed his surprise, however, and a contemptuous smile curved his lips as he murmured while passing him:

“Thou hast escaped but to be captured again. Thy freedom did not last long!”

Raoul made no verbal answer, but he returned Almeric's look in kind.

His majesty spoke:

“Messire de Raguene, thou hast been summoned hither to defend thyself against several charges made against thee by this young gentleman.”

These words of the king, and his recognition of Raoul as a gentleman, surprised Almeric not a little. However, he answered quietly and respectfully:

“Sire, I cannot answer these charges until I know what they are.”

“Where didst thou procure the brooch that bears upon it the device of the house of Rainault?”

“ From a *sorcière* in Brittany, your majesty, in exchange for a piece of gold.”

“ Why didst thou wish to have it?”

“ It was a pretty bauble, your majesty, and I knew no harm in possessing it.”

“ Where did the *sorcière* obtain the brooch?”

“ She did not tell me, your majesty, neither did I inquire.”

“ Didst thou not know that it had been given her by this messire?”

“ I have heard that he has said so, your majesty.” Almeric’s manner was perfectly respectful, still it irritated the king. He turned to Raoul.

“ Canst thou prove that the brooch was in thy possession before thou gavest it to the *sorcière*? ”

“ No, your majesty, for I showed it to no one.”

A triumphant gleam shot from Almeric’s eyes.

The king passed on to the second of the charges.

“ Why didst thou take the horse of messire? ”

“ Pardon, sire, but how should I know that any particular horse was this youth’s property? He was not along to tell me; and as no one else said aught about it, I took what presented itself at time of need. ‘Tis easy indeed to say this and that is mine; a more difficult task to prove it.”

There was a lurking smile in Almeric’s eyes, and though he apparently answered the king’s questions with respect and frankness, the king felt he was

equivocating. However, he passed on to the gravest charge of all.

“It is said of thee that thou didst try to abduct the daughter of the Sieur de Clermont. What hast thou to say in answer to this charge?”

Almeric drew himself up to his full stature, and meeting the king’s gaze squarely, said firmly:

“Your majesty, a man’s bride is his own property wherever he may find her. My promised bride had been spirited away from her father’s house on the very morn of our intended marriage. It was but natural that when I found her again I should seek to take her with me, and ask no man’s consent.”

Raoul’s eyes flashed. He took a step nearer Almeric, but the presence of the king restrained him. Still he said loud enough to reach Almeric’s ear:

“Thou liest!”

Almeric sprang back a pace, and put his hand to his sword-hilt.

“Your majesty,” he exclaimed, “am I to submit to insult in your majesty’s presence?”

King John had seemed greatly perplexed. His brow cleared. Almeric’s words proved a solution to the problem.

“No,” he said; “thou shalt meet him in open combat, face to face, in my presence; and he who best holds his own, his cause will I support. Let the encounter be arranged for to-morrow, two hours after

sunrise, in the square of the market-place. We will be there with our suite." And with a nod he dismissed them both.

"But your majesty——" remonstrated Almeric.
"I have said. Let it be done." And he waved his hand, bidding them both depart.

As the young men left the king's presence, Almeric exclaimed passionately:

"I shall bid my servant chastise thee. Never will I fight with a churl!"

Raoul's lip curled.

"Messire has been spending the past few weeks in hiding from the vengeance of Sir Griffith, who is exceedingly wroth at the outrage put upon his hospitality, else would he have known that 'tis a proved knight and the son of the Count de Rainault, thy superior in breeding and blood, who will do thee the honor to fight thee to-morrow." With these words Raoul turned on his heel, and left Almeric to learn that he was the young knight whose fame had reached even to the capital. Almeric had not remained in Brittany, but returned to Paris, having no idea that the matter would be brought before his majesty's notice, and believing that the father of the girl he had attempted to abduct would not regard the episode with disfavor, as he had seemed very desirous for the marriage.

Now he learned with great chagrin that Raoul was

the Sweet Singer of the West, whose exploits had aroused his emulation. Still, he was an accomplished fighter; few could withstand him. No doubt he could easily vanquish Raoul; then his renown would be widespread as the vanquisher of so gallant a knight.

When the Lady Ysobel heard of the intended encounter, her heart felt heavy enough. She feared that Raoul had been restored to her only to be snatched from her again, for she did not believe that he, so recently ill unto death, could withstand Almeric, of whose prowess she had been a witness and, in spite of herself, an admirer. No sleep visited her eyelids that night, which passed in tears and prayers.

At the appointed time King John, the dauphin Charles, the whole court, and an immense concourse of people assembled in the square and its vicinity to witness the encounter that was known would take place between two valiant and skilled knights. Presently the two combatants appeared armed at all points, and after taking the usual oath of not carrying concealed weapons or employing unlawful means, they were admitted to the lists. The lances were delivered, and as they awaited the signal to charge, each looked around on the gathered throng of people that crowded every place about them, coming as near the lists as the heralds would permit. Each had his supporters, and each was filled with the desire to distinguish himself in the eyes of the king and his court, but, above all, to

down his adversary, for this was to be a combat that was to decide the fate of them both. Glory or banishment. Success meant all that was dearest then to a knight's heart—glory and the king's favor; defeat meant exile and disgrace, things hard to be borne.

Almeric's colors were blue and gold, and he wore a black heron's wing in his helmet; Raoul's colors were white and silver, and beside his breastplate he wore a white lily as pale and sweet as the one who had bestowed it upon him; otherwise he bore neither device nor crest.

At the proper signal the two combatants put spurs to their horses and met in full career. Both contestants kept their seats. Again and again they rushed at each other, first vigorously, then warily, afterward furiously; again and again they met in terrific shock, but so perfectly were they matched that neither seemed to gain the advantage. Each found that he had met his equal; each put forth all his skill, dexterity, and strength; each tried to unseat the other. Advancing, wheeling, retreating, and again renewing the attack, they charged each other furiously, their steeds seemingly a part of themselves, so perfectly did they respond to every touch of hand, knee, and spur.

Breathlessly the spectators watched the combat. Ysobel never removed her eyes from Raoul, her face now anxious and pale with fear, now flushed with hope; the suspense at times seemed as if it would

stifle her. Suddenly she saw the lily drop from Raoul's breastplate. She gave a muffled scream; it seemed an ill omen. He, too, noticed its fall, and gathering himself together, he waited the attack of Almeric, made a feint of yielding, drew to one side, and then, recovering himself, rushed upon his adversary, and at length succeeded in unseating him.

Loud and tumultuous applause greeted this feat, but Raoul did not heed it. Springing from his horse, he recommenced the struggle on foot. Almeric must have received some injury in falling, for at the first stroke of Raoul he was again hurled to the ground. Regaining his feet, he sustained the combat gallantly. The passion for conquest was strong in either heart; neither took heed of his wounds, though blood was flowing freely from both.

The spectators rose in their seats and crowded about the line that marked off the lists, in spite of the efforts of the mounted guards to keep them back.

By this time Ysobel was almost frantic with terror. Lady Blanche stood up on her seat and tried to encourage Raoul with her cries; but no one paid heed to his neighbor, all eyes and thoughts were on the two contestants, who for their part were unconscious of the spectators. No one could predict the outcome yet. Almeric succeeded in dealing Raoul a powerful blow on his breast, but his sword was broken off at the hilt, while Raoul apparently was unharmed.

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Seizing his dagger, Almeric prepared for another stroke, when Raoul, with an unexpected, dexterous movement, hit the dagger and sent it out of the hand that held it spinning far into the air; then forcing him slowly backward, tripped him. Down they both went, but Raoul was on top. Just as he was about to plunge his dagger into Almeric's throat, the king gave the signal for the combat to cease. Raoul's hand was caught by one of the heralds, for he was too engrossed to observe the signal given by his majesty.

Then the king said in a loud voice:

"The victory is with him who wears the colors of white and silver. Let the other be removed from court!"

There remains little more to be said. Raoul had at length downed his adversary, after having proved himself a valiant knight, a noble son, and a friend of the lowly and oppressed. The Sieur de Clermont made no objection to his marriage with Lady Ysobel; indeed, he rejoiced in Raoul's good fortune, for really he had learned to love him like a son. Iron Hand was by no means forgotten: he was given a small free-hold, and was thus raised out of the peasant class; but he cared for nothing save Raoul, and when he went to fight the English, Iron Hand was by his side; when he remained at home, looking after the interests of the great château and its dependants, Iron Hand was content to dwell on his land near by; but did his lord ever

journey abroad, the great giant was always one of his suite.

As soon as Almeric recovered from his wounds he went south across the Pyrenees, and offered his services to Don Enriques, who was fighting his brother, Don Pedro, King of Castile. His bravery and gallantry won him a high place in Don Enriques's court when that prince succeeded in forcing his brother to fly from his kingdom. But France knew him no more.

THE END.

73-?
JL

